

Identity and Persona in the Writings of Edwin Muir

Sheila Gordon Hearn

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Abstract

That the relation between Edwin Muir, the writer, and the persona who seems to emerge from his poetry and prose is neither so simple nor so direct as the reader would be led to believe but is, rather, highly problematical is the initial concern of this thesis. The evidently conscious construction of a fictive personality has its origins in Muir's early journalism, where it serves to cope with the strains imposed on a Scottish socialist forced, by the contemporary poverty of Scottish periodical publishing, to write for The New Age — the English organ of Social Credit theory. Successive chapters trace the development of this figure as the index of Muir's ideological struggles while he sought, unsuccessfully, to reconcile the elements of his identity marked for him as 'Scottish' or 'English' through his magazine criticism, novels, social commentaries and autobiographies, analysing the repetition of pattern in his poetry. Set amid the interplay of these contending pressures during a particular historical period, Muir's life and work can be seen not as the neatly conventional narrative of victorious transcendentalist Christianity which he so assiduously fostered in his own writings, but as a particularly explicit example of the operation of political and cultural hegemonies: a model more relevant to our interpretation not only of the present situation of peripheral cultures, but also of the role of Muir's work in forming that understanding.

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Sheila G. Hearn,
August 1982

I hereby acknowledge this thesis as my own work.

Sheila G. Hearn

Abbreviations

All books were published in London unless otherwise stated.

Muir:

<u>Auto</u>	<u>An Autobiography</u> (1954)
<u>CP'60</u>	<u>Collected Poems, 1921-1958</u> (1960)
<u>Estate</u>	<u>The Estate of Poetry</u> (1962)
<u>SC&LP</u>	<u>Social Credit and the Labour Party: An Appeal</u> (1935)
<u>S&F</u>	<u>The Story and the Fable</u> (1940)
<u>SJ</u>	<u>Scottish Journey</u> (1935)
<u>S&S</u>	<u>Scott and Scotland</u> (1936)

Letters Selected Letters of Edwin Muir, edited by P.H. Butter (1974)

Bibliography Elgin W. Mellow, Bibliography of the Writings of Edwin Muir (Alabama, 1964: revised, 1966, and with a supplement, 1970)

Bibliographical Study Robert B. Hollander, 'A Textual and Bibliographical Study of the Poems of Edwin Muir' (Doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1962)

M & P P.H. Butter, Edwin Muir: Man and Poet (Edinburgh, 1966)

NLS National Library of Scotland¹

EUL Edinburgh University Library

1. Quotations attributed to NLS Ms 19671 are from the transcriptions made and typed by Willa Muir of the letters held at the British Library as Add. MS 52920

The beauty of the first person singular is that, when it is used as it should be, it implies at every moment, transpiring through the simplest statements, a whole background, a whole life; and it does this the more perfectly, the more apparently unpremeditated the narrative...

Edwin Muir, Transition (1926), p.91

Chapter I :

Introduction: First Writings, 1913 - 1919

Edwin Muir's most controversial book, Scott and Scotland, seems to end with a series of absolute pronouncements anent Scottish cultural politics. 'It is of living importance to Scotland', he writes,

that it should maintain and be able to assert its identity; it cannot do so unless it feels itself a unity; and it cannot feel itself a unity on a plane which has a right to human respect unless it can create an autonomous literature. Otherwise it must remain in essence a barbarous country. That sense of unity can be preserved by an act of faith, as it was preserved in Ireland. Our task is to discover how this can be done.¹

This extract can be seen as Muir's contribution to what has become a cliché of modern literary criticism: the notion that due to the particular character of the two Unions with England, and of the Reformation sandwiched between them, the identity of the Scottish writer is — like that of his country — continually problematical. Yet it is indicative of the peculiarity of Muir's status in relation to the traditions of Scottish and English literature that even his own formulation of the topic has not been seen as relevant to his own position.

The sense of oddity to which this gives rise is, moreover, intensified when a closer reading of the passage reveals its insubstantiality. Here Muir provides not an argument so much as a collection of statements, the relationships between which are suggested rather than demonstrated. Having claimed that it is vital ('of living importance') that an 'identity' be not only maintained but actively asserted, he defines that concept only by giving as one of the preconditions for its existence the shared,

1. Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer [henceforth 'S & S'] (1936), p.182.

intuitive apprehension of 'unity'. Further, a prior condition for the maintenance of identity must be its present survival: yet the whole movement of Muir's study is directed towards claiming precisely that there has been insufficient unity in Scotland during the previous three hundred years. Such is the importance attributed to 'identity' that its alternative is cast as some species of Arnoldian barbarism;² yet the reference to 'an autonomous literature' is phrased in terms of its being not a consequence of 'unity' but another of its preconditions. By these internal obscurities, the passage denies the possibility of a reversible process whereby literature might be turned to foster Scottish identity in the manner advocated by C.M. Grieve,³ leaving Muir with only the intuitive to offer: 'that sense of unity can be preserved by an act of faith', he writes.

This imprecision, concealed behind a façade of arbitrarily arranged statements, predicts and determines the illogicality and pessimism of his conclusion; but it also reveals the nature of the unity in Muir's own attitude. There is a disjunction between the superficial impression of rigorous analysis and the withdrawal into the vocabulary of an intangible, obscurantist, quasi-religious faith: yet without any but a formal unity, this passage still has a strong identity; and by extension Muir's demand for unity before identity becomes suspect in any context — literary, national, cultural or personal.

2. Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (1869), Chapter 3.

3. For example, in the opening of Albyn, or Scotland and the Future (1927): 'The forces that are moving towards a Scottish Renaissance are complex and at first sight incompatible. The movement began as a purely literary movement some seven or eight years ago, but of necessity speedily acquired political and then religious bearings' (p.5).

Despite the efforts of philosophers and psychologists, a full understanding of the concept of 'identity' has yet to be achieved. Nevertheless, it seems unnecessarily naïve to equate the term with the monistic, as Muir does throughout his study. As displayed by this example of his own prose, an identity may consist in the conglomerate, in the collection of diverse, disparate or even contradictory components. Similarly, the identity of an individual may be seen as the holding in tension of a number of different and possibly differing elements, each of which modifies the others and may, independently or in collaboration, take precedence at any given time in response to the interaction of the individual with his social, political and cultural circumstances. A person may be described in a huge number of terms: memories, ambitions, achievements, class, nationality, political opinion, religious faith and language, for example, are some of the aspects that must be balanced in each case. The strain imposed when the conflict between such parts becomes acute consequently reflects not only their relative priority within the individual but also the external pressures with which he comes into contact. By examining Muir from such pluralistic premises, it is possible to read the illogicality undermining his insistence on 'unity' as the reflection of the great difficulty with which he reconciled the elements of his own identity, and to begin to estimate the nature of the social circumstances in which he sought that resolution.⁴

The evidence of strain in Muir's discussion of identity may seem surprising, since his work leaves a general impression of unity which he attributed in the autobiography to the experience of psycho-

4. For an analogous argument, see the introduction to G.J. Watson's Irish Identity and the Literary Revival (1979), p.13-35.

analysis.⁵ Yet the matter of his identity is not so simple as he would suggest. To take only the most obvious indicator, for the first nine years of his literary career his writing was credited to 'Edward Moore'. The adoption of this precisely anglicised version of his name was a gesture the equal in significance — if the opposite in intention — to the invention of 'Hugh MacDiarmid' or 'Lewis Grassie Gibbon'; but no one seems to have taken it as evidence of Muir's having had some difficulty in defining the role of nationality in his own identity. The critics fall into two factions on the subject of Muir's Scottishness.

One group, led by George Mackay Brown and Tom Scott, makes much of his Orcadian childhood, as if they accepted completely the declaration in a letter of 1927:

After all I'm not Scotch, I'm an Orkney man, a good Scandanavian, and my true country is Norway, or Denmark, or Iceland, or some place like that.⁶

The context of this statement is a report by Muir of his discussions on Scottish nationalism with Grieve; and yet the almost desperate quality of the search for a country with an alternative claim to his allegiance, and the protestation in the same letter that he feels 'rather detached' from the issue, have not been seen as indicative of a deeper uneasiness. Rather, in a movement that disappointingly mirrors the pattern more

5. He writes: 'By painful stages, I reached a state which resembled conviction of sin, though formulated in different terms... I saw that my lot was the human lot, that when I faced my own unvarnished likeness I was one among all men and women... My own analysis was never finished; it had to be broken off when I left London. It was not till nine months after that, when we were staying in Prague, that I knew how much good the analyst had done me: my vague fears, I realized one day, were quite gone.' (An Autobiography [henceforth 'Auto'], (1954) p.158-9).
6. Selected Letters of Edwin Muir, edited by P.H. Butter (1974) [henceforth 'Letters'], p.64.

usually associated with the handling of Scottish literature by the English critical establishment,⁷ these critics accord him the double-edged honour of being acclaimed 'Orkney's Greatest Poet' — double-edged inasmuch as this parochial supremacy is regarded as taking him outwith the Scottish literary tradition, thereby relieving them of the responsibility to examine his writing in its terms.

Meanwhile, a larger group of critics, led by Peter Butter, fails to discern any problem in Muir's nationality because it sees him as belonging to the tradition of English mystical poets such as Herbert, Traherne and Eliot⁹; and since they can call on the evidence of both versions of Muir's autobiography (The Story and the Fable and An Autobiography¹⁰) to oppose

7. For example, by T.S. Eliot: 'Scottish literature falls into several periods and... these periods are related not so much to each other as to corresponding periods in English literature... We are quite at liberty to treat the Scots language as a dialect, as one of the several English dialects which gradually and inevitably amalgamated into one language. Only Scotland, more isolated, and differing from the others more than they differed from each other, retained its local peculiarities much longer'. 'Was there a Scottish Literature?', The Athenaeum (1 August 1919), p.680-1.
8. The title is Tom Scott's: 'Orkney's Greatest Poet - Edwin Muir', Scotia Review 18 (Winter 1977-8), p.29-37; but the attitude is widespread. For further examples, see George Mackay Brown, Edwin Muir - A Brief Memoir (West Linton, 1975), George Bruce, 'Edwin Muir - Poet', Saltire Review, VI 18 (Spring 1959), p.12-17 and Bernard Bergonzi, 'Platonic Poet', The Observer (14 July 1974), p.32.
9. Butter, Edwin Muir: Man and Poet [henceforth 'M & P'] (Edinburgh, 1966). See also, for example: Helen Gardner, Edwin Muir: The W.D. Thomas Memorial Lecture at University College of Swansea, 8 December 1960 (Cardiff, 1961), Brian Keeble, 'Edwin Muir: Our Contemporary and Mentor', Agenda, XII 4 - XIII 1 (Winter/Spring, 1975), p.79-87, I.H. Hassan, 'On Time and Emblematic Reconciliation: Notes on the Poetry of Edwin Muir', South Atlantic Quarterly, 58 (1959), p.427-39 and Sister M. Joselyn, 'Herbert and Muir: Pilgrims of their Age', Renaissance, XV (Spring 1963) p.127-32.
10. The Story and the Fable [henceforth 'S & F'] (1940) was republished in revised and extended form as An Autobiography (1954). Where the distinctions between the two versions are irrelevant, such terms as 'the autobiography', 'the autobiographical account', etcetera, are used, and quotations are taken from the more frequently reprinted Auto.

to a single letter, they have tended to outweigh the Orcadian faction.

Yet it is not the geographical distance between their rival candidates for recognition as the centre of Muir's consciousness that really divides these critics: in the service of their mutual aim — to dissociate Muir from Scotland — London and Kirkwall are merely alternative versions of the same gambit. Rather, it is the status of the evidence on which they ultimately depend that marks the significant division, although it is not a separation that they would probably be keen to acknowledge. The island party relies implicitly on a private letter written by Muir and accessible only by chance — a simple biographical datum: the other depends primarily on a reading of the autobiography as if it were of the same category. This curious reversal, whereby the personal study is more openly cited than less suspect material, marks the extraordinary status accorded that work. Ignoring the fact that it is a book deliberately and consciously created for publication, they accept it as giving direct access to the whole truth about Muir, entirely discounting the mediating role he himself must have played, as author, in the selection and presentation of the material. This role was, of course, determined by the ideology Muir had evolved by 1940.

The confusion surrounding the word 'ideology' can be made to perform an especially useful function in this investigation of Muir's development. Terry Eagleton defines the term as 'the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times';¹¹ that is, he attempts to restore its use as an innocently descriptive noun

11. Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism (1976), p.viii.

roughly analogous to Raymond Williams's 'structures of feeling'.¹² However, Williams's discussion in Keywords traces the growth of the pejorative connotations gathered by 'ideology' as it came to be used in reference to 'the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests', to a position consciously derived from a social theory and implying commitment to a distinct political stance.¹³ In Muir's case, the balance achieved between antagonistic elements of his identity — especially in relating his nationality, his peasant childhood and his working-class youth to his literary ambitions — constitutes the ideology which simply determines his early writings; but through his association with The New Age he can be seen to be developing his political convictions and choosing to emphasise or suppress aspects of this 'situational' ideology in the interests of propagandising his theoretically based, conventionally 'political' ideology. The jockeying for position between the elements of his identity can be discerned throughout Muir's writings, culminating in the renunciation of any overtly political standpoint in favour of a supposedly apolitical brand of transcendentalist Christianity; and in tracing this process the mixture of historically and contemporarily determined constituents of opinion at any given moment implied by 'ideology' is particularly appropriate.

Muir's response to his difficulties in balancing the different aspects of his identity was, then, far from equable. If the autobiography represents his own 'act of faith', if it is his major attempt

12. Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (1961), p.48ff.

13. Williams, Keywords (1976), p.126-30.

to create a unitary identity such as he had advocated for Scotland at a personal level, it is performed at the cost of denying several facets of his own self — and concealing the fact that there had ever been any conflict beyond his psychoanalysis at all. There is, for example, no reference in the autobiography to 'Edward Moore', the most blatant signal of his compromising between peasant-proletarian background and membership of an intellectual circle centred on London. But the critics have never deeply examined the principles upon which Muir's autobiographical writings are structured.

On publication, The Story and the Fable was hailed as 'a book of outstanding delicacy and integrity',¹⁴ and An Autobiography has been described by Michael Hamburger as a 'singularly honest and lucid account',¹⁵ while Rex Warner says that these writings are 'gentle and wise, modest, vivid and illuminating'.¹⁶ When Willa Muir's memoir, Belonging, was published in 1968 it was discovered that there were some things which Muir had chosen to omit, such as his wish to leave his wife for Gerda Krapp in the 1920s:¹⁷ yet, inevitably, her book was read in the light of his. Philip Toynbee, believing that Muir had written the spiritual biography and Willa had dealt only with the left-overs, complained that her account was 'very feminine, often too breathless and excited';¹⁸

14. Unsigned Review, TLS (1 June 1940), p.268.

15. Michael Hamburger, 'Connections Everywhere', The Spectator, CCXIV (18 June 1965), p.791.

16. Rex Warner, London Magazine, I (December 1954), p.80.

17. Willa Muir, Belonging - A Memoir (1968), p.80.

18. Philip Toynbee, 'A Marriage of True Minds', The Observer (14 January 1968), p.30.

and Butter, commenting that 'her mind played around the how of his visions' while his worked 'round the whence', clearly regretted that although at moments Belonging may reach down to the Fable, 'most of it is Story, well told story'.¹⁹ Q.D. Leavis, the only critic to suggest that something had been lost in Muir's refusal to give an account of literary London in the twenties (when she felt he had been 'the best critic at that time of that phase of our literature'), nonetheless conceded that he could 'hardly be blamed for writing his own book and not the one we wanted', even though the result was consequently 'disappointing for most of us'.²⁰ In her last point at least Mrs Leavis was completely and demonstrably mistaken: 'most of us' were not disappointed at all, but captivated by the autobiography. And through that enchantment Muir exercised an ability not only to fashion aesthetically the shape given to the facts of his life in the books, but also to determine the context in which critics were to examine the entire corpus of his poetry and prose, to the extent of providing the criteria by which, exclusively, they were to evaluate his significance as a writer.

At one level, the critics' pleasure in the autobiography was understandable: it explained, matched and completed the poetry. Hayden Carruth boldly declared that 'its full meaning will not be apparent to readers who are unacquainted with the poems',²¹ and Elizabeth Jennings's apparently tentative suggestion that 'this prose

19. Butter, Scottish International, II (April 1968), p.60.

20. Q.D. Leavis, 'The Literary Life Respectable', Scrutiny, IX (1940-1) p.170-1.

21. Hayden Carruth, 'Edwin Muir's Autobiography', Poetry (Chicago), LXXXVIII (October 1955), p.51.

version of his life might almost be regarded as a gloss on his allegorical poems' was in fact a remarkably precise premonition of the way in which the autobiography was to be used.²²

While it would be absurd with the days of the New Criticism past to suggest that the events of a writer's life are irrelevant to an understanding of his work, it can be recognised that the trouble with the attitude of Muir's critics is that their work has not been biographical so much as 'Autobiographical'. Whatever their disagreements over points of emphasis, they seem to share a communal blindness to the theoretical problems surrounding autobiographical writing, and this is made apparent by their failure to distinguish between the man and his appearance in his books.

It is possible to chart the growth of this radical confusion from the earliest critical responses. Time and again, the adjectives applied to the autobiography emphasise the 'honesty' and 'integrity' of the account Muir gives of his life, and these words come to characterise all levels of Muir criticism. In that disappointed Scrutiny review, Q.D. Leavis nonetheless goes out of her way to comment that he had been 'notable for his integrity in reviewing' (p.71), and others take the notion further: John Holloway asserts that the return to Scotland as Warden of Newbattle Abbey College gives An Autobiography an 'integrity of development',²³ and Alfred Kazin refers to Muir as 'a giver of testimony'.²⁴ Stephen Spender, noting that 'one feels

22. Elizabeth Jennings, 'A Poet's Life', The Spectator, CXCI (2 November 1954), p.558.

23. John Holloway, 'Enacted on a Distant Isle', Hudson Review, VIII (Summer 1955), p.313.

24. Alfred Kazin, 'A Dream-Haunted Giver of Testimony', New York Times Book Review (13 March 1955), p.4.

that he is still what he always was', adds that the only problem is that 'it is difficult to criticise a work which gives a single-minded impression of integrity'.²⁵ By 1954, an anonymous reviewer could claim unchallenged that 'nothing could be milder or more modest or more complete than his disclosures of what he thought of himself'.²⁶ But the definitive expression of the muddle comes from no less an authority than T.S. Eliot in his 1965 preface to Muir's Selected Poems:

I stress[his] unmistakable integrity, because I came to recognise it in Edwin Muir's work as well as in the man himself. The work and the man are one.²⁷

It comes as no surprise, then, that Butter's major study, published the following year, should carry the title Edwin Muir: Man and Poet. The premise of this book seems to be that whatever Muir wrote in the autobiography was true, complete and largely sufficient. The structure Muir provides for the understanding of his life might be supported with extracts from his letters (then unpublished) or tempered with some incident from Willa's memoir, but essentially Butter's attitude is to acknowledge Muir as his own best critic. Man and Poet amounts to little more than a well-informed celebration of that opinion. Its technique consists mainly of the unqualified quotation of segments of the autobiography in unquestioned explication of the poems. The apparently obvious connections are thereby reinforced: 'The Ballad of Hector in Hades' is aligned with the childhood flight from Freddie

25. Stephen Spender, 'Being Alive', New Statesman and Nation, XIX (22 June 1940), p.778.

26. 'Time's True Servant', TLS (12 November 1954), p.720.

27. Selected Poems of Edwin Muir [henceforth 'SP'], edited by T.S. Eliot (1965), p.9.

Sinclair, the 'Ballad of the Soul' with the famous 'waking dream' experienced during psychoanalysis in London, and so on (M & P, p.97-8). But there is no consideration of the role Muir played in writing the autobiography for publication, and consequently his criteria of significance, and his dicta regarding the relative importance of different sections of his oeuvre, are followed with absolute deference. For example, there is again no mention of 'Edward Moore'; and further, having written of the contributions to The New Age that 'Muir would not wish much attention to be paid to this early journalism of his' (M & P, p.73), Butter deals with the work of these four crucial years to his own satisfaction in something under two pages.

In his naïve conviction of the integrity and exclusive validity of Muir's view of his past, Butter is typical. No one seems to have wondered whether George Watson's warning of the dangers of personal reminiscence might be relevant in this particular case: 'old men forget', he writes in Politics and Literature in Modern Britain,

and so do the middle-aged. What is worse, they sometimes remember creatively, attributing to their youth views they later wish they had held when young.... An author is often a poor and unreliable witness to his own early opinions.²⁸

Muir's success in making such scrutiny seem irrelevant to his autobiography stands as tribute to the skill with which he there emphasises those areas of his experience which would provide, in return for little more than cursory reading, an abundance of material suited to the concerns of successive waves of Anglo-American criticism. For

28. George Watson, Politics and Literature in Modern Britain (1977), p.11.

example, his adolescence in Glasgow had given him the kind of class consciousness which made him stress, twenty years later, that he had never actually lived in the slums but merely passed through them daily on his way to work (Auto, p.90-1), and this awareness is so nicely expressed as to make him seem a natural ally of the growing interest in working-class culture. Indeed, the centrality of the autobiography made him easily acceptable in the 1950s by chiming methodologically with the reliance on personal reminiscence of such a class background that underpinned the New Left criticism of Williams, Hoggart and others.²⁹ Further, the vaguely Ossianic associations of coming from a small Scottish island mingled with the esoteric challenge of his imagery and the sense of his being one of the last of the peasant poets to produce in the 1960s a rash of studies, mostly from the United States of America, which sought to annex Muir as if he were an upmarket poetic, Celtic variant on the transatlantic sport of Hobbit-hunting.³⁰ And in the background to all this, his ability to handle the respective jargons of psychoanalysis and religion ensured that there would always be a steady flow of explicatory essays on these themes to keep his

29. For example, Richard Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy (1957). Raymond Williams's The Country and the City (1973) shows the typical development of the technique.

30. For example, D.K. Boyer 'A Descriptive and Comparative Study of the Poetry of Edwin Muir' (doctoral thesis, University of Missouri, 1961), F. Garber, 'Muir's Heraldic Mode', Twentieth Century Literature, XII (1966), p.96-103 and Daniel Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge: Myth in the Poetry of Yeats, Graves and Muir (New York. 1967).

reputation alive as the trends rose and fell.³¹

But this success was only partially due to Muir's powers of selection: his ability to manipulate the presentation of those aspects of his life which he had chosen to write about was at least equally skilled and, arguably, even more significant. By the creation of a specific tone of writing, amounting to a definable voice, he was able not only to determine the way in which his material was to be interpreted, but also to make it seem that no such influence had been asserted. Hoggart, whose critical reputation was built on his flair for detecting ideologically biased dishonesties in writing from and about the working class, himself slides into the familiar vocabulary of 'integrity' when trying to claim precisely this tone as the mark of successful autobiography; and although Muir's strength can be gauged from his being alone commended for achieving the required cadence, Hoggart fails to grasp the fuller implications of the problem he tackles. In holding back from deeper analysis, he becomes self-contradictory. Autobiography depends, he argues, on

questions of tone or voice. For myself, I would like to find a voice which could carry a wide and deep range of attributes and emotions without being socially self-conscious or derivatively literary. Among modern autobiographers I know hardly anyone who

31. Examples include James Aitchison, 'The Limits of Experience: Edwin Muir's "Ballad of the Soul"', English, XXIV (1975), p.10-5 and J.P. Celli 'The use of the Term Archetype in Contemporary Literature' (doctoral thesis, Kansas State University, 1974). See also Christopher Wiseman, 'Edwin Muir's "The Labyrinth": A Study of Symbol and Structure', Studies in Scottish Literature, X 2 (October 1972), p.67-78, Kathleen E. Morgan, 'The Search for a Pattern: The Poetry of Edwin Muir' in Christian Themes in Contemporary Poets: A Study of English Poetry of the Twentieth Century (1965), p.431-57, J.F. Hendry, 'Time and Edwin Muir', Adam International Review, 247 (1954), p.3-7 and Horace Gregory, 'To Explain is not to Understand', New York Times Book Review (11 March 1962), p.5.

has found this tone, this clarity which seems almost like talking to the self, since no one is being wooed. Edwin Muir's autobiography has this quality, and about it one can properly use phrases like 'sensitive integrity'. He was a poet and he used his poetic skills here in a disciplined way.³²

Hoggart's use of quotation marks indicates his discomfort in this passage, and yet he cannot break through the confusion of the earlier reviewers. He knows that this tone which convinces him of Muir's 'sincere integrity' can only be a product of the 'poetic skills' to which he pays tribute; he knows that he is dealing with a text that has been consciously created, fashioned to make a certain impression on the reader; and yet part of that impression is the conviction that no impression has been intended at all. Having been seduced by his art, Hoggart vehemently denies that Muir was trying to woo anyone. The function of style in the autobiography would seem to be to deny its own existence.

If the text attempts to hide itself in this way, then only the narrator can be holding the book together. Of course, this is a false distinction, since the narrator exists only in the text: in fact, he is the text, since it consists only of the words he selects in the characteristic style in which he chooses to use them — in short, in the tone created by that style. Tone and narrator, then, are one. But the distinction does usefully suggest the source of that pervasive belief in the integrity of the autobiography. If the narrator is to hold the book together, he must be a complete and convincing construction, a thoroughly integrated persona strong enough to prevent the book from

32. Hoggart, 'A Question of Tone: Some Problems in Autobiographical Writing' in Essays in Diverse Hands, Being the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, XXXIII (1965), p.18-38 (p.28-9).

disintegrating in disorder. But this persona, which is an aspect of the text, must not be mistaken for Edwin Muir. Roy Pascal is quite astonishingly naïve when he claims that Muir's 'moving evocation of his childhood is not justified through being a piece of fine writing; it is the embodiment of his spirit'.³³ It is precisely because it is 'a piece of fine writing' that Pascal reacts in this way; but what the text embodies is not Muir's 'spirit'. Rather, it is the persona which he has chosen to imbue with some aspects of his own identity — most notably, some of his memories. But the selection of those aspects, made according to the ideological convictions he held at the time of writing, turns the persona into something of quite a different order from the identity of Muir himself. The 'integrity' of the persona is a matter of deliberate literary artifice, of creating a viable, convincing figure in much the same way as a character in a novel may be invented, although under different constraints; and the personal 'integrity' of Muir remembered by his family and friends is quite irrelevant to the role of that persona in the text.

Since the autobiography is as much a consciously created literary artifact as the poetry, in providing the one in explanation of the other Muir was setting up a self-reflexive system for the study of his writing. Together they form a closed, exclusive structure which will prove satisfactory so long as its terms and the expression of its values are sufficient, but which necessarily, in the interests of the willed creation of the unitary identity of the persona, denies significance to many important aspects of Muir's identity. The skill of the writing

33. Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (1960), p.134.

charges this system with so high a degree of elegance that the critics have been imprisoned within its terms, and much of their work has consequently consisted of examinations — usually celebratory — of the design of small areas of the device.³⁴ Yet Muir was most anxious not to claim any credit for this success. In a letter sent to George Mackay Brown while he was in the course of revising The Story and the Fable he writes:

I have not much news except about this confounded autobiography, which is giving me a headache and which runs quite nicely for a little while, and then stops, and then runs on again not quite so nicely, and then stops again, and doesn't seem to have much shape of any kind; I don't see how one can give any shape to one's life very much.³⁵

Butter excludes this from the Selected Letters and in quoting it in Man and Poet (p.246) he helps perpetuate the illusion of artlessness by omitting without comment the last two words, which Muir himself had excised from the typewritten letter. This movement towards denying his formal role culminates towards the end of An Autobiography with a more absolute denial:

some kind of development, I suppose, should be expected to emerge, but I am very doubtful about such things, for I cannot bring life into a neat pattern. (Auto, p.280)

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34. To cite just two examples, Gregory claims that the autobiography provides 'a valuable backdrop to the poems, a far better exegesis of their visionary content than a conventional critical analysis would yield' in 'The Timeless Moment in Modern Verse: Edwin Muir', Spirit of Time and Place (New York, 1973), p.201; and David Galler states that the autobiography and the poems depend upon each other of their 'ultimate explication' in 'Edwin Muir', Poetry, 94 (1959) p.331-2.
35. E.M. - George Mackay Brown, 22/9/53, Edinburgh University Library [henceforth 'EUL'], MS Gen. 767/7,5.

This denial that the book has formal elegance is an attempted negation of the persona whose completeness underlies that patterning; and it arises from Muir's ideological intentions. Perhaps the most accomplished example of his eventual commitment to narrative, to the telling of stories which reinforce patterns of development, structures of feeling, conventional to the acceptance of Western culture, it marks his final political opposition to many of the levels of intellectually revolutionary development with which he had ambiguously engaged since he began writing. The major premise of the autobiography is that pattern and form can be known only on the transcendental plane of the Fable and cannot be lived out in the Story of an individual's life; and yet Muir's account of his life is marked by its satisfying form and integrating structure. It is part of the function of the persona to charm the reader with a sense of hearing the voice of a man of integrity so convincing that even the illogicalities of this application of this part of his ideology are overlooked. Pascal is less simplistic in dealing with the theory of his subject than in treating Muir's practice: an autobiography, he states, gives a coherence to life, and 'this coherence implies that the author takes a particular standpoint, the standpoint of the moment at which he reviews his life, and interprets his life from it' (Design & Truth in Autobiography, p.9). In Muir's case the sense of reinterpretation from a particular juncture is especially strong, since the autobiography grew out of the spiritual journal he kept in the late 1930s to deal with his latest conviction of Christianity.³⁶ From 1939, his religious

36. See Auto, p.244 - 247.

faith, in a particular transcendentalist form, became the dominant element in his ideology. His thought may have altered in terms of emphasis from that point, but his ideology was never again to undergo radical revision, such as occurred when his Nietzscheanism or his socialism lost priority.

When writing poetry, Muir had almost always allowed the religious element of his identity to take precedence. Consequently, to find on the publication of the autobiography from within the new order by which this aspect was dominant in all areas of his writing that the prose and verse were complementary should not have been so unexpected as to prevent an examination of his work on any other grounds. The willingness to accept Muir's system was no doubt encouraged by the publication of The Labyrinth in 1949 and One Foot in Eden in 1955: the reinforcement of his poetic transcendentalism by its adoption in all other spheres, and by the applause that had greeted the autobiography, results in their making the structure appear even more elegant. But just as Scott and Scotland had attempted to rewrite Scottish literary and cultural history in accordance with his growing pessimism for the future of Scotland, the autobiography attempts to reinterpret his personal history in compliance with his renewed Christianity. Since his response to external pressures had led the chief characteristic of that Christianity to be its transcendentalist emphasis, the autobiography shows him denying not only the consciousness with which he wrote that book (and, by extension, the persona which constituted its form), but also various elements in his ideology no longer congruent with his final beliefs and the fact that they had on occasion been the determining, directing components of his identity.

Moving outwith the elegance of Muir's system demands a willingness to reject the neatness of his narrative for a different plan of his development, less tidy and more complex, in order to see the confusions and occasional contradictions of his position as he struggled to balance the elements of his identity against each other and against the external pressures of society. It also requires a readiness to contend with the disapproval of those who have been happy to accept his system and the ideology for which it canvasses support, since the structure is satisfactory only if precedence is granted to the transcendental. Kathleen Raine's scorn for such attempts reveals a total confidence in Muir's persona and a complete acceptance of his terms:

the conscientious researcher who comes later to fill in the temporal events that Coleridge did not record in his Biographia or Yeats in the Hodos Chameleontos can add little or nothing to our essential knowledge of the lives of the poets.³⁷

Her very reference to 'essential' knowledge suggests a shared infatuation with the world of Platonic absolutes. Roger Knight maintains this attitude, and expresses it less subtly: 'the directive to the critic of Muir's own work is clear', he says; 'if it does not exercise his "capacity for admiration", he had better leave it alone'.³⁸

Yet an escape from this world must be attempted if Muir criticism is ever to get beyond the cosy consensus that currently prevails and examine the wider significance of his work. One way to begin is with

37. Kathleen Raine, 'Books in General', New Statesman and Nation, XLVIII (27 November 1954), p.711.

38. Roger Knight, Edwin Muir: An Introduction to his Work (1980), p.5.

the thesis that Muir created a persona in accordance with his ideological concerns in the autobiography because this method of writing had been forced upon him by the politics of cultural circumstances since the time of his first publications (when the persona had had a separate name to mark its existence) and the method had become endemic. Every work, in poetry or prose, involved for him the creation of a persona and the denial of its existences. An examination of this dualism could tell us far more about Muir and about the society of which he was a part than could any new study of time, heraldry or archetype in his writing, since the writer was neither 'the gentle Muir' of whom Maurice Lindsay continues to talk.³⁹ nor the ideological innocent George Bruce describes as having almost accidentally produced Scott and Scotland,⁴⁰ nor any of the other personae he created, but the far more interesting man who felt driven so to create.

Writing of the aims of literary criticism, Frederic Jameson says:

the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the thinker's position in society and history itself, and of the limits imposed on that awareness by his class position — in short, of the ideological and situational nature of all thought.⁴¹

Muir's first thirty-two years were spent, as a peasant and as a member of the upper working-class, in Scotland. His identity in 1919 was

39. Maurice Lindsay, Francis George Scott and the Scottish Renaissance, (Edinburgh, 1980), p.89-90.

40. George Bruce, 'The Borderer and the Orcadian' in The Age of MacDiarmid: Essays on Hugh MacDiarmid and his Influence on Contemporary Scotland, edited by P.H. Scott and A.C. Davis (Edinburgh, 1980), p.101.

41. Frederic Jameson, Marxism and Form (New Jersey, 1971), p.340.

that formed by the effect of spending those years in that class in Scotland as it then was; but part of that situation involved the absence of a commercial outlet for the kind of writing he wanted to do. 'A little while ago I made an attempt to get into journalism', he writes to H.L. Mencken in July 1919, 'but there appears to be no place there for me in this country, and such places as I did see were not more enticing than an office' (Letters, p.21). Reviews such as Blackwood's and newer periodicals such as The Thistle and The Celtic Review were published in Edinburgh while Muir was in Glasgow,⁴² but his

42. The Thistle, subtitled 'A Scottish Patriotic Magazine', was published in Edinburgh from 1908 to 1918. Founded to provide 'a literary organ exclusively devoted to Scottish affairs - to the maintenance of Scottish National Rights, and more especially to the preservation of the National Honour of Scotland' (No 1, August 1908, p.2), it dealt mostly with Scottish politics and history, excluding Muir's socialist, philosophical and literary interests. For example, the contents of No.6, Jan 1909 were:

- 'The Thistle' papers - 21. Headlines of Scottish History
- 22. On the alleged meanness of the Scot
- 23. Lord Rosebery on the Downgrade
- A Highland Minister on the Scottish Land Question
- Mr Walter Long's Insult to Scotland
- The Scots the Strongest Race in the British Empire
- Gaelic and Nationality.

The tone of the magazine may be gauged from a comment in the last of these pieces: Gaelic it claims is one of 'the sweetest and most musical tongues in Europe - especially when chanted by Highland Maidens' (p.96).

The Celtic Review, 1904-1916, also came from Edinburgh. It tended to specialise in learned articles such as those of the issue dated October 15 1904: for example, 'Egyptians and Celts', 'The Glenmason Manuscript', 'Irish Riddles', 'The Legend of St Brendan', 'Cael Mor - its Structure and Definitive Terms', 'Welsh and Semitic' and 'A Jacobite Walking Song'.

asking Mencken whether 'there is a greater opportunity in America for original work in the journals and reviews' shows that he felt them inhospitable to the kind of writing he wanted to do. It seems that he may have done a little reviewing for The Glasgow Herald (M&P, p.71), but this was inadequate as the basis for his ambition to 'make a living by writing'. Almost twelve years later, he states, starkly and with some bitterness:

I fancy that almost every other country in the world gives its writers a chance to live in it; Scotland does not.⁴³

Grieve, too, stressed that this cultural hiatus was the chief cause of Muir's moving to London when discussing his growing reputation in 'Contemporary Scottish Studies': 'it is deplorable', he says,

that when for the first time in its history Scotland produces a literary critic of the first rank it has no organ to offer him in which he may express himself, and a reading public of which only an infinitesimal portion can follow, or profit by, what he writes, so that he is compelled to devote himself to English or American periodicals where his subject-matter seldom has reference to Scottish interests, and in which he is practically debarred from a creative Scots propaganda of ideas'.⁴⁴

Grieve accurately assumes that Muir will have to choose his topics to suit his audience, and that because he has been driven out of Scotland, he will inevitably become part of an Anglo-American 'propaganda of ideas'.

43. 'Why Scots Writers Emigrate', Glasgow Evening News (2 September 1931), p.4.

44. C.M. Grieve, 'Edwin Muir' in 'Contemporary Scottish Studies', The Scottish Educational Journal (4 September 1925), p.906-9 (p.906); reprinted in Hugh MacDiarmid: Contemporary Scottish Studies (Edinburgh, 1976), p.29.

While the ideological developments and transformations resulting from having to tailor his work to the expectations of English middle-class culture led immediately to the use of 'Edward Moore,' the subsequent developments caused by his later travels and repeated returns to Scotland are equally revealed in his use and denial of developed versions of that persona. Only by examining Muir's work from outwith the restrictions his late ideology made him try to impose can an understanding be reached of the development which resulted in his ultimate withdrawal into a faith in transcendental absolutes, leading him to seek such an embargo. This examination would deepen our awareness of the situation in which Muir lived, where his ideological development was typical of the rule to which Grieve was the exception. But since Muir's books and their working of his ideology have become part of our culture, of the situation which helps to determine our 'structures of feeling', it is of more than academic interest that we should become aware of why and how they act; indeed, it is essential if the study of Muir is to advance the achievement of that level of self-consciousness which is the aim and justification of the practice of literary criticism.

I.2

First Writings, 1913 - 1919

1909	October	: Begins reading <u>The New Age</u>
1913	October	: Begins 'We Moderns'
1917	September	: Ends 'We Moderns'
1918		: Publishes <u>We Moderns</u>
1919	September	: Moves to London; within a few months, assistant editor of <u>The New Age</u> .

When George Watson warns that, for all their particular authority, the personal reminiscences of writers do not necessarily constitute the whole truth and are not imbued with any exemption from the biases of the time of writing, he goes on to stress the importance of a return to the primary sources. 'Only documentary evidence dating from youth itself', he argues, 'is clear evidence of the convictions of youth' (Politics and Literature, p.11). Yet even this rigorously empirical attitude underestimates the complexities of dealing with a writer's complete oeuvre. The notion that pieces having temporal priority are charged with some prelapsarian innocence by virtue of the author's comparative youth is an oversimplification which, in leading Watson to forget his own reminder that critics deal with texts at a level which renders the language of 'belief' both inappropriate and dangerously misleading,⁴⁵ reflects the continuing pervasive influence of the Edenic myth. But by discounting the textuality of all works, it sets up a false dichotomy within the cannon that at best postpones — and at worst evades — the essential problem.

A writer's opinions and beliefs, and the priorities by which he orders them during the period of composition, condition his writing. While his ideology is more likely to change during his life than to remain static, it would be logically impossible for the author ever to step outside the convictions of the moment and write from an entirely unbiased standpoint. Ideology is not a corruption accompanying age

45. 'Intellectual history is about what men have said, in speech or in writing. The verbs "to think" and "to believe" are too convenient to be avoided here, but they are not in this context to be regarded literally'. Politics and Literature, p.12.

but a continuous factor, the components of which - and their ordering - may change, but whose presence is an immutable constant. The critic's task is not to discover some early text and acclaim the ideology it expresses as the 'real' or 'true' faith of the writer, but, despite Muir's veto,⁴⁶ to seek to understand the internal and external pressures, the conflicts within his identity and between that identity and the society in which he lives, that result in the alterations in his ideology over the years.

Moreover, one of the most significant of the external pressures exerted by society on the writer is virtually discounted by Watson's formulation, which seems to imply that the author's sole concern when writing is the expression of his own ideology. While this might be a valid supposition in dealing with private writings such as diaries or - less certainly - personal letters, it is inadequate as the basis for any account of a published work. Whatever the species of writing - political argument, literary review, autobiographical prose or lyric poem, for example - publication necessarily implies that the author enters into the communication of his ideology to his readers. But since published works are a commodity whose existence depends to a large degree, directly or indirectly, on their commercial success, the author must take into account the ideology of his audience if he is to persuade them most effectively to accept and buy his work. The status of this accommodation, then, is that of a particular determining factor influencing the author's decisions on the form and content of

46. He writes of Yeats: 'I feel that to explain anyone is an attempt that should never be made'; but the passage continues, 'I am concerned with the poetry and what worked such a radical change in it, and the probable forces in Yeats's life which may have helped to bring the change about' (The Estate of Poetry [henceforth 'Estate'] (1962), p.45), which would make the apparent proscription redundant.

his writing.

In Muir's case, the rhetoric of his writing, the techniques he developed in order to communicate and to convince, remained stable throughout his career, despite massive shifts in the priorities by which he arranged the elements of his identity, altering his ideology in response to his changing environment. Whether producing the political propaganda of 'Our Generation', the reviews and novels of the twenties and thirties, the famous and infamous analyses of Scottish culture, or the autobiography by which he sought to deny that his ideology had ever truly been different from that espoused in 1939, his writing employs the same identifiable features, mutatis mutandis, to win the assent and compliance of his readers; and the nature of these features, most notably the use of a persona, may also be accounted for in terms of a response on a technical level to the same internal and external conflicts of ideology as determined the content of the works.

For all these complications, Watson's empiricism remains an essential characteristic of the method by which a study of these techniques, leading to an understanding of Muir's ideological development, might be attempted. Any such essay must therefore begin, not with his account of his childhood in Orkney for which there exists no independent documentary evidence by which it may be assessed, but with Muir's account of his first published writings and of his relationship with the periodical in which they appeared, The New Age.

It is a mark of Muir's literary skill that the techniques employed in the autobiographical persona's depiction of his past — the ways in which he shapes his own history in accordance with the criteria of

his transcendental Christianity so as to convince the critics of his 'integrity' — are not especially complex. For example, elements of that past 'obdurately unsusceptible to this patterning, such as the relationships with Gerda Krapp and Chris Grieve or the authorship of Scott and Scotland, are completely omitted from the account. But since so drastic a move would arouse suspicion if repeated too frequently, it is more usual to find discussion of earlier commitments and their one-time supremacy within his ideology in terms that ensure the greatest emphasis is placed on their less reputable aspects and imply their having been merely superficial enthusiasms, diversions from his 'true' development towards Christianity. This is the strategy used, with varying degrees of subtlety, in Muir's writing about the many different areas of his work for The New Age and its influence on his career; and its operation may first be directed in the autobiographical discussion of his earliest published writings, the contributions he made to the paper from Glasgow between 1913 and 1918.

Muir denies absolutely the political motivation and significance of these pieces. They constitute a collection of about a dozen poems and some epigrams which he places wholly within the context of one of his recurrent bouts of obsession with Heine's poetry:

I steeped myself in that sweet poison, and began to write lonely, ironic, slightly corpse-like poems, which I sent to Orage, who accepted them. I was twenty-six, and it was my first attempt at writing. When, a little later, I discovered Baudelaire, the shock of reading a man who was genuinely obsessed by death, and not merely coquetting with the shroud and the tomb, cured me of that infatuation. (Auto, p.146)

It would have been quite understandable had Muir wished to enter a plea in mitigation on the grounds that these poems were his 'first attempt at writing'; but he goes further and tries to make the whole business of first publication — usually a time of much excitement and encouragement — seem the shabby product of a kind of sickness: Heine's poems are described as 'poison', albeit 'sweet', and disparaged as mere coquetry, in comparison to Baudelaire; and his own work is dismissed as the result of an infatuation with this second-rate material of which he is said to be soon 'cured'.

While none of these pieces is more than doggerel, the point remains that they are not the kind of doggerel which Muir describes. He had accepted a moderate tradition of Socialism which led him to join Blatchford's Clarion Scouts and the Independent Labour Party, and to believe in the efficacy of the Guild Socialist movement as a step towards the reorganisation of society: and he began to read The New Age in 1909 (shortly after Holbrook Jackson had withdrawn leaving sole editorship to A.R. Orage), precisely because it was then the organ of that movement. Undoubtedly he was also attracted — and increasingly so — by the intellectual breadth of the paper, which, denying any simplistic base-and-superstructure model of the relation between economics and culture, was subtitled 'A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature and Art'. It carried articles on international developments in philosophy, psychology and all the arts; and indeed, this characteristic eclecticism was to have a great influence on Muir's development. But in the first place the attraction was above all political, and these first contributions constitute a statement less of his ambition to be a poet than of his desire to show a shared concern

with the injustices fostered by capitalism.

The New Age enjoyed printing pastiches of poetic styles, and if there is anything 'ironic' about Muir's poems it is only in the minor sense of their being written with tongue in cheek. 'A Chronicle of Woe' (C3),⁴⁷ for example, is composed of iambic pentameters and designed to lament the operations of the free labour market:

There lived a man (but now his life is o'er)
 Who toiled from dawn to night, yet evermore
 Found that prosperity escaped his hand:
 Yea, he was the most wretched in the land.
 At brutish tasks his meagre strength he spent,
 With care his soul, with toil his back was bent;
 Yet would he gladly have endured his lot,
 To work and work, to bear and grumble not,
 If even so he'd had security.
 Alas! e'en drudgery was denied him; he
 With cheerless gait tramped the cold countryside
 Seeking the phantom labour. (1.1-12)

The collection of 'poetic' archaisms (such as 'o'er', 'Yea', and 'e'en') and the inversions of syntax in the interests of neat parallelism (such as 'With care his soul, with toil his back was bent'), combined with a rhythm that alternates between the boring and the barely managed, strongly suggest that both content and form were tailored to suit the style of the paper. Similarly, 'To the City Class' (C10) is an attack not only on profiteers, but on the whole

47. Poems, essays, reviews etcetera published in periodicals are cited where applicable by the identifying code assigned them in Elgin W. Mellown's A Bibliography of the Writings of Edwin Muir (Alabama, 1964, revised 1966 and (with a supplement) 1970).

financial system underpinning the countries at war; and even the most self-indulgently and self-consciously 'poetic', a vaguely Tennysonian piece seeking the rescue of 'The Forsaken Princess' (C12), finally works its way round to appealing for action on a political level ('She is called the Princess Britain,/This fair, forsaken one.' 1.55-6).

Just as the verses are an attempt to align himself with the political and literary sides of The New Age, the epigrams, which are totally ignored in the autobiography, can be seen as marking his desire to be identified with the wider ethos of the magazine. Indeed, being contributions to attacks on the paper's current bêtes noires, such as Arnold Bennett(C13), James Stephens (C15) and John Galsworthy (C16), they mark his desire to join the coterie who produced the paper.

However, as a clerk in Glasgow, Muir had developed an ideology which could not match that of an intellectual circle in London quite perfectly. Living in a different country and a different class, he was susceptible to pressures with which they were unlikely to be in contact. Indeed, the discrepancies between his ideology and that of the magazine was to be the major problem of his association with the paper after 1919, and, on a broader level, typical of his whole career. It is significant that the first foreshadowing of the problem should be apparent in the political attitude of one of these earliest poems, 'Address to the Wage-Slaves' (C5). Again, the piece is very lame verse designed to convey a political message; but this time it is not a revolution in consciousness but a revolution in the streets that is recommended in order to usher in the new age:

Ye wage-slaves, deaf too often to your good,
Oh, listen not to selfish counsels weak,
And weak desires that tempt you to embrace

A generation's comfort at th'expense
 Of servitude forever for your children.
 But to the harsh, brief, cold word reticent
 Of Duty iron-tongued attune your ear.
 And if aught noble ye can still achieve,
 If, flaccid-limbed weak-soul'd and hunger-spent,
 Ye once yet o'ercome your lethargy,
 Gather your lax and mighty limbs together,
 Brace your great thews and summon from its lair,
 Where drugged in sleep it lies, the spirit pure
 Of your forgotten manhood, Circe-charmed,
 Oh, now is come the struggle, now the hour.
 Not for yourself ye fight, mankind awaits
 Impatiently your holy proclamation,
 And cannot stir until your fight is won. (1.1-18)

This image of the proletariat as a drugged, bewitched beast sleeping in its lair, exhorted to throw off its lethargy for inevitable victory in political 'struggle', by its echoes of the closing stanza in Shelley's 'The Mask of Anarchy'⁴⁸ reveals the depth of his involvement at this time in what had become a working-class tradition of overtly and committedly left-wing poetry; and it displays a zeal for direct action that was not to last long with Muir. From the mould of the

48. 'Men of England, heirs of Glory,
 Heroes of unwritten story,
 Nurslings of one mighty Mother,
 Hopes of her, and one another,

 Rise like Lions after slumber
 In unvanquishable number,
 Stake your chairs to earth like dew
 Which in sleep had fallen on you -
 Ye are many - they are few.' § XXXVII - XXXVIII

'The Mask of Anarchy' (1819); Shelley: Poetical Works ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 2nd edition corrected by G.M. Matthews (1970), p.341.
 § XXXVIII is repeated as the final stanza, XCI (p.344).

self-educated, upper working-class, Edwardian clerk — indeed, a founder of a branch of the National Union of Clerks⁴⁹ — his tradition of thought depended on advocating the gradual amelioration of the system in order not to frighten the bourgeoisie or tarnish the image of 'the respectable working-class' with hints of 'bloody revolution'. Although he spent the First World War in Glasgow, he seems to have made no mention of the activities of the 'Red Clydesiders', and his letters suggest that he first heard of the notion of a Scottish Socialist Republic in the 1920s, through Grieve.⁵⁰ The significance of 'Address to the Wage-Slaves' is that it shows Muir responding, albeit unconsciously, to elements in the culture within which he lived, despite its conflict with elements of the English intellectual ideology to which the piece was intended — at least in part — to align him. The poems are evidence that the impulse which first led Muir to publish verse was his commitment to political activism, and that from the beginning he was, with greater or lesser success, tailoring his expression of his ideology to that — slightly but significantly different — of The New Age. Such activism and such literary manipulation were quite incompatible with the political quietism and attitude of naïve directness of the autobiographical persona; and since any account which relates these aspects of the earliest writings

49. Butter, footnote to Letters, p.155.

50. He wrote in December 1923:

'The Scottish members should make a move for Scottish Home Rule, and then they would have the field to themselves. Do you know if that idea has taken hold of the Socialist parties in Glasgow or not? There's a man, C.M. Grieve, a Socialist, running the idea in The Scottish Nation... Perhaps in a few years Scotland will be a Socialist Republic. I shouldn't wonder: things are moving so fast.' (Letters, p.30).

to the context of his association with The New Age thereby extends the period and deepens the significance of such interests, making them more difficult to discount as a short-term diversion from his spiritual growth, the autobiography assigns them, exclusively and therefore wrongly, to Heine's influence, and describes them misleadingly.

In all these respects — the autobiography's biased account of embarrassingly dissenting material and its playing down of political awareness and personal ambition, Muir's being responsive to elements of Scottish culture which were not matched in the English-based group he wished to join, his adoption of a style in conformity with established English practice — the pattern of these earliest pieces is paradigmatic of the major problems of his early career.

A further paradigm may be discerned in the critics' handling of this sector of his work. Robert Hollander regards these pieces 'mainly as curiosities',⁵¹ although he does not give his reasons for suggesting their subsidiary interest. He places them in an appendix to his study because, he argues,

to give each of these pieces its own entry would be to invite a surplus of attention, as well as to confuse the reader by making these early works seem a major part of Muir's 'development' as a poet. (p.101)

Although he recognises that only a few of the poems might be said to bear 'even the slightest resemblance to Muir's own description' (p.101),

51. Robert Hollander, 'A Textual and Bibliographical Study of the poems of Edwin Muir' (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1962), p.101.

and although the use of quotation marks suggest some repressed uneasiness, Hollander nevertheless accepts Muir's separation of his "'development" as a poet' from the beginnings of his literary career in fitting his work to the stance of The New Age; and he further seeks to prevent any other reader from being 'confused' into suspecting these pieces of relevance by tucking them away at the end of the descriptions of all Muir's other poems and presenting them in a completely different style and format. Convinced by the autobiography's description of the past to the point where he seeks to suppress inconvenient empirical evidence out of a patronising concern that others should not be troubled by it even to the degree of his own minor discomfort, Hollander's argument here becomes a model of the collaboration of critics with the autobiography.

Butter's description of the period shows the continuation of the process. He accepts the letter of Muir's account of the poems, saying that 'a few, written in imitation of Heine, attempt to combine irony with sentiment', but he also notes that 'some are versified propaganda on current politics' (M & P, p.56). However, having accepted the criteria of value established in the autobiography, he dismisses them all because 'none are the expression of an authentic personal vision' (M & P, p.56), and chooses not to examine the nature or the role of such propaganda in Muir's career any further. 'The New Age', he argues,

was a stimulus to Muir's mind, but, like his friends in the Clarion Scouts, did little to help him rediscover the source of his special power within himself. It released over him a flood of exciting ideas, but he could not at that time distinguish those which were in accordance with his deepest intuitions from those which were not. In consequence we find him in the

next few years adopting a series of opinions and attitudes which were not native to him. (M & P, p.38)

More clearly even than the simple statement that 'his political activities and his large reading of political literature were misdirections, albeit honourable ones, of his energies' (M & P, p.47), this passage, by virtue of its vocabulary, reveals the extent of the autobiography's influence. Fostered by Muir's transcendentalist mysticism, Butter's anti-intellectual disparagement of 'ideas' and separation of them from 'the source of his special powers within himself' are further moves towards the privatisation of the writings. Only ideas 'in accordance with his deepest intuitions' — that is, presumably, those bolstering his religious convictions: how intuitions are to become accessible without becoming ideas is not explained — are to be considered. This romantic concept of the artist leads Butter to the point of primitivism in his insistence on the primacy of the 'native', so that he seems to hover on the brink of pre-empting Hoffman's presentation of Muir as the unspoiled hero of mysterious knowledge and uncivilised powers from the Celtic mists.⁵² Such an attitude to Muir, assuming that any work other than those directly concerning his development towards Christianity is irrelevant to the critics — and, indeed, to that development itself — severely limits the terms in which the significance of his writing may be discussed and evaluated.

This restriction is again apparent in the accounts of Muir's first series of contributions to The New Age. From October 1916 to October

52. Hoffman's Barbarous Knowledge exemplifies this approach.

1917 he published, irregularly, a column under the general title 'We Moderns'. Each article consists of several individually-titled paragraphs, mostly aphoristic in style, and a selection from these was reprinted in 1918 as Muir's first book.

The autobiographical version of events, being concerned to make the earlier philosophical commitment which 'We Moderns' reflects and embodies appear another diversion from his 'true' development, attempts to initiate the desired opinion through the terms in which the series is discussed. The first mention of the articles states that they were written when he was 'still under the influence of Nietzsche' (Auto, p.151): since that influence has already been disparaged some thirty pages earlier, it is immediately apparent that 'We Moderns' is not to meet with the approval of the autobiographical persona.

Although Muir had been advised by Orage from London to continue his self-education by studying one work or author in depth, he had rejected the suggestion that it might be the Mahabharata. 'After some hesitation,' he writes, 'I chose Nietzsche' (Auto, p.126). Apart from this unexplained vacillation, there is no suggestion that this decision was anything other than arbitrary; but this account filters out the important effect of the general cultural situation. Patrick Bridgwater's study of Nietzsche's reception in the English-speaking world concludes that while his works enjoyed a considerable vogue following their translation in 1902, that celebrity was confined to a comparatively tiny sector of the advanced intelligentsia.⁵³ He variously influenced, for example, Shaw and Wells, Yeats, J.C. Powys and D.H. Lawrence, to the

53. Patrick Bridgwater, Nietzsche in Anglo-Saxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature (Leicester, 1972).

point where not to have been aware of him might be said to be an indication of not having belonged to the avant-garde; and one of the reasons for his pervasive influence within this restricted world was that Orage, an early disciple, had published many articles on him in The New Age.⁵⁴ Although his own enthusiasm was waning by the end of the decade, his magazine had adopted Nietzsche's work as part of the intellectual climate in which it worked, and its readers were expected to be able at least to understand the frequent allusions to his philosophy. Since he lacked precisely this breadth of intellectual life in Glasgow, Muir's choice of Nietzsche cannot be seen as the innocent mistake which he depicts it to have been, but can more certainly be interpreted as an attempt to follow and emulate Orage, and to equip himself for membership — albeit at a distance — of his circle.

While the incompatibility of the early poems with the later Christianity was dealt with by putting them in a context outwith his spiritual concerns, the strategy employed in accounting for 'We Moderns' casts those pieces within the same religious system but on the opposing side, so making them stand merely as a reflex of his temporary loss of faith. Describing his period of allegiance to Nietzsche as being quite unintellectual — thereby echoing the intuitive vocabulary used positively in talking of his religion — he states that he 'had no ability and no wish to criticise Nietzsche's ideas' (Auto, p.126), and

54. Orage's own studies included Friedrich Nietzsche: the Dionysian Spirit of the Age (1906), Consciousness, Animal, Human and Superhuman (1907) and Nietzsche in Outline and Aphorism (Edinburgh, 1907); and Bridgewater lists a dozen articles appearing in The New Age from October 1907 to July 1910.

he castigates his past self for failing to see that they were 'quite incompatible' with his socialism, 'little suited to a clerk in a beer-bottling factory' and even 'tinged with madness' (Auto, p.126-7). His reading of Levy's translation is even said to have ruined his 'feeling for good English' (Auto, p.127). The lengthy account of his dream in which Nietzsche commits the blasphemy of attempting to usurp the cross (Auto, p.129) confirms the antithetical role to which it is assigned, and lends the whole business of his interest in the German philosopher a slightly absurd aura of diabolism. Regarding it as a compensation for his loss of faith, he claims that the 'perpetration' — a word hinting that it was almost some kind of criminal enterprise — of 'We Moderns' ended its efficacy: from such a point of view, the book's no longer being in print can be cause only for some relief (Auto, p.151).

Although Butter discusses individual articles at some length, he does not differ from Muir's account. He explains Nietzsche's attraction as having been due to his being 'a poet and prophet as well as a thinker, expressing himself in myth and parable and metaphor rather than by logical argument', so accounting for his influence by relating it to Muir's poetic interests; and adds that he had 'a special appeal for those who had lost faith in Christianity, and yet felt the need for something more than a merely materialist creed to put in its place' (M & P, p.57). Since his justification for this chapter of Man and Poet is that 'We Moderns is our most direct means of making contact with Muir as he was in his twenties' (M & P, p.59), making it clear that his only interest is to find the character of the autobiographical persona in the early writings, his adoption of this argument is predictable.

Bridge-water writes that Muir succumbed to Nietzsche's influence 'more completely than any other British writer' (p.96); and indeed 'We Moderns' is largely written in imitation of his work. But if the project of trying to find a man in a sequence of literary texts is abandoned and the series is examined as part of a literary career, then they can be seen as performing a different role, that of validating Muir's credentials for membership of a particular grouping of the political and cultural avant-garde.

Moreover, all these early works were published under his anglicised pseudonym, 'Edward Moore'. In Scottish Journey,⁵⁵ Muir explains that 'We Moderns' was largely written during the breaks organised by the clerks to take advantage of the lax atmosphere in his current office (SJ, p.139-40); but he used the pseudonym from 1913, some years before this need for secrecy existed, and the anecdote fails to account for the precise anglicisation involved or for its continued use in The New Age after he had left Glasgow and even later while on the Continent and publishing under his own name in other periodicals. These circumstances suggest that the nature and use of the pseudonym were directly related to the ethos of The New Age, arising from the fear that contributions obviously from a Scot — no matter how closely they conformed to the paper's ideology — would be resisted by the readership, if not by the editor and his circle. This problem can be seen to invoke a more complex response from Muir in his later articles in the magazine, published after he had moved to London in 1919 and become Orage's editorial assistant, and showing the development of 'Moore' from a pseudonym to a persona.

55. Scottish Journey [henceforth 'SJ'], (1935).

Chapter II :

The New Age, 1919 - 1923

1919 September : to London
1920 November : begins 'Our Generation'
1921 August : to Continent
1922 September : ends 'Our Generation'
November : begins 'Causerie de Jeudi'
1923 August : ends 'Causerie de Jeudi'

II 1

After their London wedding in June 1919, Muir returned to Glasgow and Willa Anderson set about finding a place where they might live. Having rented and furnished rooms in Guildford Street, she was astonished to find on her arrival in Scotland that her husband had not resigned his job in a Renfrew office. 'But you said you didn't want to be a clerk all your life, and that you wanted to get out of Glasgow', she said ... 'But I'm earning three pounds seventeen and six a week', he replied . (Belonging, p.30-1)

In Willa Muir's memoir, this anecdote performs several roles. Showing how little she knew of her husband and emphasising her comparatively greater adventurousness, it also supports the image of Muir's unworldliness: by 1968, with knowledge of his success by virtue of hindsight, and with the effects of inflation making the security of £3/17/6 a week seem so tenuous as to be negligible, his appeal to an economic argument appears slightly ridiculous, the result of his timidity and an inability to discuss his neuroses. But the fact that Muir was concerned about his earnings is at least discernible in Belonging: the autobiography suggests (albeit with the touch of wry amusement associated with a man complacently considering the naiveties of his youth) that at the time the subject was of no interest. Implying that they were infected by their surroundings with a Peter

Pan-like insouciance, he claims that he and his wife existed

in a suspended state, waiting for work, not really apprehensive, for we could not imagine the possibility of not finding it: the work was there, invisible for the present, and one day it would appear. When we were tired of looking for it we went to Kensington Gardens, and in complete idleness dreamt through the afternoons. (Auto, p.155)

Since Muir's psychological difficulties continued in London through several months of psychoanalysis, the discrepancy between the anguished protestations recalled by Willa and the confident ease portrayed in Muir's account cannot be explained merely by the fact of their having left Glasgow. The autobiography's description reinforces the impression that Muir, seen here as too interested in idle 'dreams' — a term associated throughout that work with the spiritual and poetic aspects of his identity — to be 'really apprehensive' about diurnal economic realities, had always conceded the dominance of the transcendental element of his ideology. Willa had lost her post at a ladies' college on her marriage, and was able to find only less well-paid work at a crammer's, so when Muir accepted Orage's offer of £3 for three days' work each week, the loss of nearly a quarter of his income must have imposed the kind of difficulties he had anticipated from Scotland. The autobiography discounts this entirely, slanting

the image of the past to help create the feeling that the supremacy of transcendentalism in the autobiographical persona is natural, the inevitable realisation of his 'true' self as foreshadowed in such early attitudes, rather than the result of internally and externally determined modifications of ideology. And this strategy of selecting the aspects of the period which can be turned to congruence with his later concerns is followed throughout the description of his time in London and his continuing association with The New Age.

The account of his career during these years, for example, is very thin. Having mentioned that reviewing for The Athenaeum and providing drama criticism for The Scotsman boosted his income to an acceptable level (Auto, p.157), he makes no comment on the manner in which this new work was approached nor on its relationship with his contemporary editorial training.

Instead, emphasis is placed on his personal life. Having arranged for Muir to join the paper, Orage's first role in the 'London' chapter is not as editor of The New Age but, surprisingly, as the provider of Muir's introduction to psychoanalysis through his friendship with Maurice Nicoll and his colleagues (Auto, p.157). Moreover, having chosen to ignore the interest possibly inherent in a description of the Jungian analytic method he met in the early 1920s,¹ Muir

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1. In the introduction to Dream Psychology (1917), Nicoll writes 'I shall feel justified in producing this book if it enables its readers to regard the dream, in some degree, from Dr Jung's standpoint, and I desire to place on record here the debt that I owe personally to Dr Jung.' (p.vi). He is more stringent in the second edition, 1920: 'I believe that we find in the unconscious material - in the dream - a typical doctrine or tendency, which is not unrelated to the central teachings of many religions. I believe that doctrine or tendency to be relative to the necessity of the development of the individuality - the rebirth of the self from collective values to individual ones. The rebirth symbolism of dreams has been very badly handled by Freudians' (p.ix-x). Both indicate the influence of Jung on Muir's chief analyst.



concentrates exclusively on his subjective experiences. The five-page account of a particularly vivid 'waking dream' details such religious images as Muir and his wife rising on angels' wings to sit on the shoulders of 'a gigantic figure clad in antique armour, sitting on a throne with a naked sword at his side' (Auto, p.162); and although other dreams are left in comparative obscurity, the cumulative effect of their description is to suggest that the spiritual — and, tangentially, the poetic — development they signify is the most important aspect of the period.² Further, the similarly protracted account of his friendship with John Holms (Auto, p.177-181) also stresses the personal side of this stage of his life at the expense of his public and literary development.

The autobiography does give some space to his association with The New Age, but this is largely taken up by a discussion not of the paper itself but of the personalities surrounding it. Orage's influence is not discussed in the concrete terms of his writings, but in the impressionistic terms of Muir's interpretation of his character, and these derive from the autobiographical persona's transcendental

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2. Auto, p.163-7. He writes: 'I did not know at the time what to do with these mythological dreams, and I do not know yet; I used the trance for a poem, but a poem seems a trifling result from such an experience.' (p.165). 'Ballad of Eternal Life' (C131), which was revised as 'Ballad of the Soul' for Collected Poems (1960) [henceforth 'CP '60'], is generally held to be the poem in question: for example, see James Aitchison, 'The Limits of Experience - Edwin Muir's Ballad of the Soul', English, XXIV (1975), p.10-15; but Muir's account, with the characteristic modesty of the persona, implies that even this poetic form is secondary to the religious centre of the experience.

Christianity. Consequently, passages apparently praising Orage resolve themselves into an indictment, undermining each positive quality, on the grounds of his failing to achieve the kind of spirituality held to be the standard within the autobiography. For example, his skill as an editor is seen as a gift for clarifying thought, but only at the expense of altering its essential character: 'his mind', says Muir,

was peculiarly lucid and sinuous, and could flow round any object, touching it, defining it, laving it, and leaving it with a new clarity in the mind. From a few stammering words he could divine a thought you were struggling to express, and, as if his mind were an objective clarifying element, in a few minutes he could return it to you cleansed of its impurities and expressed in better words than you could have found yourself. This power was so uncanny that at first it disconcerted me, as if it were a new kind of thought-reading. Sometimes the thought was not quite the thought I had had in mind, and then I was reassured; perhaps, indeed, it was never quite the same thought, though it came surprisingly close to it. He was a born collaborator, a born midwife of ideas, and consequently a born editor. His mind went out with an active sympathy to meet everything that was presented to it, whether trifling or serious; and his mere consideration of it, the fact that his intelligence had worked on it, robbed it of its triviality and raised it to the level of rational discourse. (Auto, p.172)

Continuing the anti-intellectual bias of the autobiography, Orage's intuitive qualities are praised — his ability to 'divine' a thought, his attitude of 'active sympathy' — while his skill in objective expression is referred to as 'uncanny', as if it were the cheap trickery of 'a new kind of thought-reading'. His seriousness of

approach is turned into a lack of discrimination as he deals equally with the significant and the trivial, and his major success is described as an ambiguous talent for elevating unimportant matters to the level of 'rational discourse'.

Having undermined his intellectual life, the autobiography further attacks Orage's spiritual interests by implying an ineradicable dilettantism. 'Ever since his youth', it is claimed, Orage

had taken up and followed creeds which seemed to provide a shortcut to intellectual and spiritual power. He had been a theosophist, a member of a magic circle which included Yeats, a Nietzschean, and a student of Hindu religion and philosophy. He was convinced that there was a secret knowledge behind the knowledge given to the famous prophets and philosophers... it was this that made him throw up The New Age a few months after I had left it, and put himself under Gurdjieff's directions at Fontaine^ebleau. (Auto, p.173)

The derogatory suggestion that for all his self-discipline Orage was searching for a 'short-cut' cancels out the tribute paid in acknowledging that he was prepared 'to sacrifice everything and take upon him any labour, no matter how humble or wearisome or ab^struse' in the interests of his quest (Auto, p.173-4). The hint of unreliability implicit in the listing of his various enthusiasms is reinforced by giving the rather pretentious yoga mantra which Orage recommended to the Muirs;³ and an account of the book he loaned them cataloguing 'all the spiritual dominations, principalities and powers, giving the exact numbers and functions of each' (Auto, p.175) emphasises further the

3. 'Brighter than the sun, purer than the snow, subtler than the air is the self, the spirit within my heart. I am that self, that self am I' (Auto, p.173).

tendency to crankiness in such matters.⁴ This eccentricity is not even seen as being original: rather, it is a given characteristic of the New Age circle as a whole, as represented by Mitrinović.

The decision to introduce Mitrinović at this point was not arbitrary. Although he is not described at great length, that he and Orage are analogous figures is suggested by again using an account of a book which was lent to Muir by the 'tall, dark, bullet-headed Serbian with the lips of a Roman soldier' (Auto, p.174), to imply the absurdity of his ideas. Noting that it was a French volume and that it described 'the history of man since his birth in Atlantis, when he was a headless emanation with flames shooting from his open neck' (Auto, p.175) is sufficient to complete the impression of his oddity derived from the account of his thought:

He was a man for whom only the vast processes of time existed. He did not look a few centuries ahead like Shaw and Wells, but to distant milleniums, which to his apocalyptic mind were as near and vivid as to-morrow. He flung out the wildest and deepest thoughts pell-mell, seeing whole tracts of history in a flash, the flash of an axe with which he hewed a way for himself through them, sending dynasties and civilizations flying... He would arrive with a large bottle of beer under each arm and talk endlessly about the universe, the creation of the animals, the destiny of man, the nature of Adam Kadmon, the influence of the stars, the objective science of criticism (for he held that it was possible to determine the exact greatness of every poet, painter and musician and set it down in mathematical terms), and a host of things which I have since forgotten. (Auto, p.174-5)

4. The book was called The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception. By noting Orage's admonition that he might get something out of the book if he did not 'read it too critically', Muir suggests that what intellectualism Orage had was not applied to all aspects of his life, so further denigrating the man and simultaneously casting fresh doubt on the species of spirituality he pursued. (Auto, p.175)

The hint of violent apocalypse in the image of Mitricović wielding a flashing axe against the centuries seems out of joint with the list of his rather abstract interests and mildly silly convictions such as the project of a mathematically formulaic aesthetic; but this is because what Muir claims to have 'forgotten' is that the column Mitricović largely wrote for The New Age under the joint name 'M.M. Cosmoi', 'in an English of his own, filled with energy but difficult to understand' (Auto, p.174), was savagely anti-Semitic, and that, whatever its unspecified influence on Orage,⁵ he himself had found it deeply attractive. 'Our Generation' would appeal to its precepts as authority in discussion of contemporary events, as for example when it was suggested that an English Jew should be appointed Indian Viceroy:

There is no question of impugning the qualities of the Jewish people. Their tact, ability and character it is impossible not to admire; but as the writers of World Affairs have insisted, they are not members of the Aryan race, and cannot undiluted be made the instruments for the Aryanisation of the world. Yet the Press talks of sending Lord Reading to India as the representative of Aryandom, and only a few have made any protest against it. Nevertheless, everyone would feel it was wrong if Lord Reading were called Sir Rufus Isaacs. (C73-10)⁶

There are several reasons why Muir might wish to hide this allegiance, including the disgust at anti-semitism aroused by his experiences in post-war Europe and the possibility that the views expressed by 'Moore'

5. Mitricović, Muir says, 'had a great influence on Orage at this time' (Auto, p.174).

6. Mellown allocates only one code, C73, to the entire series of articles. To identify individual pieces, a second sequence of numbers has been assigned chronologically, and full references are tabulated in bibliographical appendix 2(a).

were not necessarily held with absolute conviction by Muir even in 1921. Whichever took precedence in 1940, the autobiography's intention is clearly to suggest that Muir observed the follies of his fellow contributors and even of his editor from a secure position within his own ideology.

That the characteristics of that ideology included a claimed apoliticality is stated when Muir refers to Orage's attempts to persuade him to write the weekly editorial of the paper. His efforts are said to have met with an uncompromising integrity:

I was capable of doing only one thing, which was to write what I thought in my own way. I did not have Orage's intense interest in politics. I did not possess real political intelligence, and although in Orage himself this would merely have inspired him to acquire an interest in politics and create in himself a political intelligence, in me it had the opposite effect; I thought that if I yielded I should be unfaithful to what talent I had. Orage at last gave up his attempt to get me to write the 'Notes of the Week' and uncomplainingly continued them himself. (Auto, p.171)

Orage is here made to serve as the political figure against which Muir's apoliticality may claim to be defined. There is a curious movement, if the passage is read in context, whereby apparent self-depreciation resolves itself as self-congratulation: Muir describes himself negatively in relation to Orage — he was 'capable of doing only one thing' in contrast to the polymathic editor; he could only 'write what I thought in my own way' whereas Orage could articulate, albeit with alterations, another's ideas for him; he 'did not possess real political intelligence' and was not inspired by this lack as he says Orage would have been — but within the autobiographical ideology, the episode takes the cast of the denial of a temptation to which

Muir refuses to 'yield' for fear of being 'unfaithful' to his true, transcendentalist self. By this choice of vocabulary and use of negative syntactic structures, that which appears immediately in terms of the New Age ideology as churlish inadequacy is read in terms of transcendental Christianity as heroic steadfastness; and one more indictment, that of attempting to entice Muir into the foreign world of politics against his natural inclination, is added to the charges of intellectual confusion and spiritual dilettantism against the New Age circle and its political ethos.

Conspicuous by its absence from the autobiographical account is any discussion of the nature of that political ethos: the attempt is rather to condemn by association, using the journalistic ploy of attacking an ideology by blackening the reputation of its adherents. The critics have drawn from this the obvious conclusion concerning Muir's own contributions to the paper: 'Muir would not wish much attention to be paid to this early journalism of his' writes Butter (M & P, p.73), and he goes on to argue that this realisation should be regarded as delineating the boundaries of critical investigation rather than as itself being the subject of enquiry because

in these articles he was sometimes uncharacteristically ill-tempered and carping, sometimes too confident on matters of which he was ignorant. He adopted the stance, distasteful to him later, of a prophet denouncing his contemporaries for spiritual impotence while himself having nothing very precise or securely-held to offer. (M & P, p.73)

The complaint is not that the writings of this period are 'uncharacteristic', but that Muir himself was behaving 'uncharacteristically' in producing them, and this again reveals the depth of the conviction

that criticism of his works should find early writings of interest only in so far as they conform to the image of a character created in the autobiography — the picture of a man whose spirituality lifts him above or beyond such evidence of fallibility as being impatient or poorly informed. Butter can suggest that the failure of the early journalism to provide many traits of that person (a) means that in those articles Muir was 'adopting 'a stance', but such is his loyalty to the precepts of the autobiography that he cannot consider it even possible that some or all of his later writings — including the autobiography — may have used the same technique. Assuming that the autobiography is true and that all else is somehow consequently false, he remains unconcerned by the question of the reasons for this 'uncharacteristic' mendacity: for Butter, Muir only becomes interesting once he has achieved spiritual calm and has something 'precise or securely-held to offer', and the processes which determined the nature of that special knowledge are regarded as irrelevant.

As a result, Butter writes of his acquaintances at this time as 'a good many cranks and charlatans' (M & P, p.82), merely acknowledges the existence of the distinctions between the different groupings within Muir's work for The New Age, and is satisfied to deal with the evidence of his association with the paper — the writings of almost four years — by examining the 'Our Generation' series — in something under four pages — to seek out the few elements which match the autobiographical image. The distortion this approach can cause is exemplified by his suggestion that 'Moore's concern with the Anglican church is indicative of a latent spirituality' (M & P, p.72),

ignoring the wry comment that on occasion 'it almost seems as if religion and superstition were not the same thing' (C73-75).

Maintaining the orthodox opinion that these articles are eccentric to Muir's true development, Butter concludes that 'this kind of thing was not his métier, and he was discovering where his real strength lay' (M & P, p.92).⁷

The incipient anti-intellectualism implicit in the autobiographical assertion that Nietzsche's ideas could not be repudiated has already been noted; but that is not the sole significance of that section of the text. Muir says that the 'infatuation' with his theories was unnaturally prolonged 'since they gave me exactly what I wanted: a last desperate foothold on my dying dream of the future' (Auto, p.126), so suggesting that his Nietzscheanism was the final — and rather unsavory^U — blossoming of the political concerns and commitments that had led him, through The New Age, to the German philosopher. Yet 'Our Generation' began as the most politically optimistic gesture of his literary career, reflecting Muir's faith in his ability not only to be assimilated by a dominant foreign cultural formation, the operation of the English periodical, but to choose a sector of that formation, The New Age, which would offer the opportunity to direct his writing towards changing the entire economic, social, political and cultural structures of capitalism.

The development of these series reveals that the price Muir paid for admission to the Douglas-New Age circle — ironically, the denial

7. In a more recent article, '"Edward Moore" and Edwin Muir', Akros, XVI 47 (August, 1981), p.34-47, Butter maintains that although 'the farmer's boy and the social critic still existed within the mature poet' (p.46), the poetry is to be accorded precedence.

of precisely those Scottish and working-class aspects of his experience which had made him want to help alter the functioning of capitalism — was not sufficient to protect him from the greater irony that the apparently radical programme for which he had opted proved to be radically conservative, seeking to strengthen a variant of the centralism it had seemed to oppose entirely, and effectively acting as the licensed form for dissent originating in the bourgeois conscience, thereby assimilating and neutralising its threat to the status quo.

II 2

'Our Generation' is Muir's second major series of articles, following 'We moderns'. Consisting of ninety-six articles, it ran from November 1920 to September 1922; and its chief importance is that the evidence it provides of Muir's ideological development and supporting technical virtuosity at this time reveals not only the underestimated significance of his relationship with the magazine, but also the ideological import of the autobiographical and critical treatments to which it has been subjected.

The main precondition of Muir's association with The New Age was the absence of any serious journal of political and cultural affairs in Scotland for which he might have written. He may have done some reviewing for The Glasgow Herald while working as a clerk, but the scope and level of the arts coverage of a daily newspaper could not rival the opportunities offered by a weekly review devoted to a total revaluation of society: and Grieve did not begin his attempts to fill this void, with such publications as The Scottish Chapbook and The Scottish Nation, until after Muir's departure for the south.⁸ But on his arrival in London he found that there had been a major change in the policies of the paper to which he had become accustomed to look for a lead. This may explain the delay of about a year, during which he learnt how to edit the paper and contributed occasional reviews and articles (including what appear to be the abortive beginnings of two series, 'Recreations in Criticism' and 'New Values'), before the launching of 'Our Generation' as a column completely in tune with the new philosophy of the magazine. The New Age had at this time two distinguishing characteristics to which the paper's attraction for Muir may be attributed. The first was its policy of insisting upon the inter-relatedness of all aspects of culture. If the condemnatory force of 'totalitarian' had

8. The Scottish Chapbook was published in Montrose from August 1922 to November/December 1923, and The Scottish Nation from May to December 1923.

not become exclusive,⁹ that term might usefully suggest the political direction in which the magazine's development led its 'totalising' approach. The journal maintained its refusal to regard aesthetics as a phenomenon of a secondary superstructure throughout its life, continuing to aim at the mixture described by Gerald Cumberland in 1919:

Its literary, artistic and musical criticism is the sanest, the bravest and the most brilliant that can be read in England. It reverences neither power nor reputation; it is subtle and unsparing; and if it is sometimes cruel, it is cruel with a purpose.¹⁰

The other chief enticement of The New Age did not prove so constant. Its advocacy of Guild Socialism was suddenly submerged, coming to be regarded in the magazine as a stage towards a different reformation of society based on Major Clifford Hugh Douglas's theories of 'Social Credit'.

Muir does not discuss this programme in his autobiography, mentioning Douglas only as the agent who seduced Orage from the Guild system which is described as 'one of the most satisfactory plans for a Socialist State which have ever been attempted in this country'

9. The definitions in two modern dictionaries are brief and stern: 'of, denoting, relating to or characteristic of a dictatorial or one-party state that regulates every realm of life', (Collins English Dictionary, 2nd edition (Glasgow, 1979), p.1533); 'belonging to a system of government by one party that allows no rival' (Chambers Family Dictionary (Edinburgh, 1981), p.827).

10. Gerald Cumberland, Set Down in Malice (1919), p.131.

(Auto, p.147). His attitude to the Guild System is ambiguous, the apparent praise being undercut by the use of upper case initials in the phrase 'a Socialist State', carrying all the disapproval of communist machinery that Muir had developed by 1940; but this does not lessen the implication that Social Credit, being omitted, is less interesting and less important. Yet it can be argued that this was the greatest single influence on Muir, its principles informing his writing on both the conventional levels of form and content at the time when its potential success seemed imminent — and informing his thinking so completely that it continued to act, in different ways, as a factor in his ideology discernibly affecting his work long after its public failure had become irrevocable. Indeed, its legacy is apparent to the end of Muir's career.

Social Credit came to The New Age in 1919, and was established by June (just a few months before Muir settled in London) when Douglas began the serialisation of Economic Democracy.¹¹ Although the autobiography suggests that because Muir refused to contribute to editorials Orage continued to write them alone, the extent of the paper's commitment to the new theories may be gauged from Douglas's frequently composing the 'Notes of the Week' from 1919 under his own name. The stance of the paper changes from general left-wing sympathies (such as those expressed by Orage on the railway strike in October of that year) to advocating an analysis governed specifically by Social Credit doctrine (as written by Douglas the

11. The periodical appearances ended on 7 August 1919, and the book was published in 1920.

following month, for example).¹² The speed of this transition can also be estimated from its being thought necessary to have a familiar contributor reassure readers that

Douglas's ideas are by no means subversive of our former economic opinions and theories. On the contrary, they are the fulfilment of them; and they are destined, so I believe, to transform from theory to reality the splendid conception of National Guilds with which The New Age will always be inseparably associated.¹³

Hugh Kenner argues that the chief attraction of Douglasism for writers and artists — it influenced Pound, Eliot and Grieve, for

12. Orage writes, in this case:

The carefully-taught parrot-press has been repeating the phrase as if it were a mantram, that this is a 'strike against the community'. So, in effect, it is; but in this respect it does not differ from any other strike, great or small, or, for that matter, from any lock-out, or even from any of the normal operations of capitalist industry. The very concept of capitalist industry is anti-social, or, at least, social only by accident.

('Notes of the Week', The New Age (9 October 1919), p.385)

Douglas, on the other hand, makes explicit reference to his own specific theories:

So utterly detached and abstract is the official Labour Party from the facts of the position that it professes to be attacking that it seems unable to retort with any effect that the great mass of its numbers are working day after day, and year after year, on articles they never use in order to obtain money which will barely buy them the simplest necessities of life.

(Notes of the Week', The New Age (13 November 1919), p.17)

13. 'R.H.C.', 'Readers and Writers', The New Age (6 November 1919), p.12.

example — was that its theories of value¹⁴ 'relieved art from the impasse of aestheticism by absolving it of the need to demonstrate its immediate utility'.¹⁵ In Muir's case, however, the transition was probably eased as much by the experience of the life he was

14. An outline of 'The New-Age Economics' was frequently published 'so that all readers may know the thesis, and be enabled to follow the arguments':

1. Gold has been a standard of currency but has never been the standard of value.

2. The ultimate standard of value always tacitly recognised by mankind is calorific or energy value in food and fuel, in other words, the means of maintaining life itself. To secure these men will give all their gold.

3. The supply of gold has become totally inadequate to bear the weight of credit, in the form of national debts, issued during the war. Unless there is a vast increase in the gold supply, notes cannot again become convertible.

4. A true paper currency must be based on the ultimate standard of value; the calorific values of food, fuel and raw products.

5. By fixing the price of these under cost and covering the cost by an issue of credit, States would stabilise their own currency; produce a recognised international medium of exchange; stimulate agriculture and mining which are a necessary basis of all industry; stimulate manufactures by capitalising the worker with cheap food, fuel and materials; set a limit to the possibilities of State interference with manufacture and retail, and prevent the possibility of artificial slumps; give the public, through low prices for food, fuel and raw materials, the means of protecting itself by co-operative factories, small industries and handicrafts against attempts on the part of Trusts to charge excessive prices; and finally, so increase the production and distribution of energy, purchasing power, and demand for goods that the fallacy of "ca'-canny", of objection to machinery and improvement of process and sabotage would be demonstrated. The upward tendency of dividends, salaries, and wages would exceed that of prices. Machinery would be given no rest except such as metal fatigue requires, and Trade Unions would concentrate on a struggle for shorter hours and improvement of process.

6. Production would be so stimulated that there would not be a false inflation of the currency. The State would receive interest on its issues of credit from an expanding revenue, and would, when necessary, contract credit by increase of taxation or by using revenue as well as credit to maintain the fixed prices of raw products. Taxation would play the same role in Consumer Credit as the Bank Rate plays in Producer Credit.

(The New Age, 21 December 1922, p.123)

15. Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (1972), p.316-7.

leaving as by the ideals of that he sought to enter. He had spent about fifteen years working in various offices in and around Glasgow, often dealing with systems of cost accounting — Harvey Wood was to say that not the least of Muir's contributions to the British Council in Edinburgh was his ability to sort out in minutes a set of figures which had completely puzzled everyone else (M & P, p.190) — and Douglas's basic argument was that cost accounting embodied the fundamental fallacy of the capitalist system. He sets out this argument in numbered steps in Economic Democracy:

1. Price cannot normally be less than cost plus profit.
2. Cost includes all expenditure on production.
3. Therefore, cost involves all expenditure on consumption (food, clothes, housing, etc.), paid for out of wages, salary or dividends as well as all expenditure on factory account, also representing previous consumption.
4. Since it includes this expenditure, the portion of the cost represented by this expenditure has already been paid by the recipients of wages, salaries and dividends.
5. These represent the community; therefore, the only distribution of real purchasing power in respect of production over a unit period of time is the surplus wages, salaries and dividends available after all subsistence, expenditure and cost of materials consumed has been deducted. The surplus production, however, includes all this expenditure in cost, and, consequently, in price.
6. The only effective demand of the consumer, therefore, is a few per cent of the price value of commodities, and is cash credit, which is controlled by the banker, the financier and the industrialist, in the interest of production with a financial objective, not in the interest of the ultimate consumer. (p.75-6)

This analysis came to be known as the 'A+B theorem': that wages, A, could never logically meet the cost of production so long as that was A + B, B consisting largely of the interest paid on bank loans for the

purchase and maintenance of plant; and it seemed to lead to a new programme for introducing Socialism. In Social Credit and the Labour Party, Muir argues that 'the Labour Party wish to change society by taking over first of all the means of production; while we who believe in social Credit would begin by taking over the means of exchange',¹⁶ so allowing for the payment of National dividends; but most of

16. Social Credit and the Labour Party: An Appeal [henceforth 'SC&LP'], (1935), p.16. He goes on to make the dubious claim that this preference is closer than Labour Party policy to Marxist thought:

I honestly think that in insisting at the present stage of Capitalist development on the importance of ensuring control of exchange Social Creditors are acting more in the spirit of Marx than his more orthodox followers. Marx foresaw, as you know, that the last stage of Capitalism would be the accumulation of financial capital. This stage has been reached, and since that is so, surely anyone should see that an effective attack on Capitalism now must have a different approach from the traditional attack of thirty or forty years ago, when capital was mainly industrial. The stronghold of industrial capital was the ring and the combine; the stronghold of financial capital is the banking system. You may say that these two things, industrial capitalism and financial capitalism, are integral parts of the same power, and there no doubt you are right; but one is primary and the other secondary, and my quarrel with your party is that it goes on hammering away at the secondary manifestation of the system as it did 30 years ago, ignoring the deviation of Capitalism since, and ignoring Marx as well. (p.17)

This rather dubious argument can be seen now only as a propagandist move, seeking to convert Muir's readers to his own opinion; but that the movement originally appeared to be dangerously radical should not be forgotten: A.C. Hixon notes that The New Age was banned from the US mail in 1919 on the grounds of being subversive ('Light Dust of Fame: A Critical Study of the Life and Thought of Edwin Muir' (doctoral thesis, University of Louisville, 1960), p.101). The interest of Douglasism for today's economists would seem to be its awareness of the potential advantages of technological development: Bill Jordan and Mark Drakeford note that Social credit aimed

to increase incomes without increasing costs, by introducing dividends to all citizens in measure with increases in output. As technology conferred the benefits of non-manual production, these dividends would gradually replace wages and salaries as the main source of incomes for all citizens.

'Major Douglas, Money and the New Technology',
New Society, LI 903 (24 January 1980), p.167.

this pamphlet is devoted to a defence of the underlying principle of Social Credit ideology which was at once its greatest strength and its major handicap, and which had the most prolonged of its overtly political effects on Muir: its gradualist, anti-revolutionary stance, 'The most urgent argument against a violent revolution', he writes,

is the suffering it would be bound to bring; but that is not the only argument nor, I think, even the most important one. In a violent upheaval many bad things are destroyed, but many good things are destroyed as well; and once a good thing is destroyed it can never be replaced again... It is comparatively easy to destroy institutions and even systems; it is infinitely difficult to produce a civilization out of the resulting debris, no matter how admirable the new institutions or the new system may be. (Social Credit, p.11-12)

This inherent conservatism opened Social Credit to the potential support of the concerned middle-class, especially members of the intelligentsia who already desired a socialist state but who had been terrified by contemporary reports from Russia, as Grassie Gibbon recognised when he had Ewan Tavendale refer to the theory as 'the Bourgeois Funk-Fantasy'.¹⁷

17. Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Grey Granite (1934), p.101. He shows his contempt for the scheme by having Ellen Johns seem to demolish its argument from a position of apparent common sense:

'Even Mr Quaritch forgot his books, the pussy-cat had snared him as well, he'd waggle his thin little beard at her and tell her stories of the Daily Runner, and start to explain the Douglas Scheme, the Only Plan to Save Civilization by giving out lots and lots of money to every soul whether he worked for it or not. Who would be such a fool as work at all then? Miss Johns would ask, but she'd ta'en it wrong, Mr Quaritch would marshal bits of bread to prove the Scheme again up to the hilt, and Miss Johns would say it sounded great fun, she knew there was Relativity in physics, this was the first time she'd met it in maths.' (p.83)

As such it was Douglasism's major potential attraction, but it was also the chief flaw in the idea. Conservatism is implicit in the total absence from Social Credit writings of proposals for engineering the implementation of the scheme: attacks on the illogicality and inefficiency of the existing system depend on contrasting descriptions of the Douglasite utopia to come, when everyone will be able to afford all the material productions required from the National dividend plus the wages from no more than three or four hours' work a day; but there is no consideration of the manner by which this system is to come into operation. It is not suggested, for example, that there should be a programme for the lobbying of M.P.s, or for the election of Social Credit members. It seems to be assumed that Social Credit is so clearly the answer to all political and economic ills that it will come about almost naturally, just as soon as enough people have heard the details.

This lacuna in the theory made it absolutely dependent on being communicated, on being passed from Douglas to as many other people as possible, and this explains the modification of its title to 'the Douglas-New Age Scheme'. Fulfilling the long-standing totalising notions of the magazine, this conjunction offered the journal the function of sole and essential agent in changing the political and economic structures within which it worked. As 'National Guildsman' wrote on 16 October 1919, the defeat of 'Prussianism' surely meant 'the end of the fisticuffs era': if society were to progress (and even so soon the movement is through rather than towards the Guilds — 'the scheme already several times referred to for bridging over, without social catastrophe, the interregnum between Capitalism and

Economic Democracy'), it must be 'by argument and persuasion' (p.404).

The paper Muir joined in 1919 was in the first flush of a new enthusiasm, having found the theory for which it might have been designed, for which it might almost have been waiting, and which had confirmed its vital part in bringing about the eponymous new age.

As part of this enterprise, 'Our Generation' can be seen as far more than miscellaneous hack journalism. Within the context of The New Age, the column assumes a very specific role which remains constant beneath the apparent profusion of the materials on which it draws. This function depends on the fear that the paper will be hindered in its task of spreading the Douglasite message by the channels of communication being governed by established institutions that wish to maintain the existing system, and by the processes of understanding and receiving new ideas being deformed to the point of blockage by the lazy habits of thought which they induce and encourage. 'Our Generation' aims not to argue the case for Social Credit directly¹⁸ (since that is done in 'Notes of the Week', in 'Economic Democracy' and in many other occasional pieces), but rather to carry out the necessary supporting (if not prior) task of attacking the 'superstitions' which prevent the acceptance of that case, and thereby to make the way clear for true communication and understanding.

This programme may have been inspired by an article Pound wrote (a part of one of his many series in the paper) in January 1920, which shows that the plan of 'Our Generation' was entirely in keeping with the attitudes of the magazine at this time. It defines the key term

18. Although Muir does on occasion make an open appeal for Douglasism: for example, C73-19/32/44/8/51/2.

of Muir's series: 'What I want the reader to consider', says Pound, is the type and types of mentality which cause the obstructions to peace, to sane economics, to sane 'customs'; and which make possible the prolongation of 'superstitions', superstes, left-overs.¹⁹

'Systems were made for men, not men for systems', wrote Douglas (Economic Democracy, p.18), and 'Our Generation' depends on faith in the political principle that if people could see clearly the faults of the system under which they suffer, they could and would take effective —although unspecified —remedial action. The most explicit statement of this faith comes in the seventeenth article of the series:

Men cling to the belief that, by a necessity in the nature of things, they must fight for their bread; that they must 'fail' or succeed at the expense of their brothers; and this belief gives birth to a legion of terrible passions, to anxiety, suspicion, fear, envy and hatred. The way to freedom lies open to them, but they cling to their superstitions, preferring them when they are hideous to the truth when it is fair. The most pressing need for humanity to-day is the same as it was in the time of Lucretius: intellectual emancipation, the power to realise that in every sphere two and two make four; the knowledge that they have created mysteries, most of them malignant, where everything is perfectly simple. (C73-17)²⁰

The method of 'Our Generation' is to dismantle each problem — possibly one of the benign legacies of his reading of Nietzsche²¹ —

19. The New Age (18 January 1920), p.177.

20. For further examples of the attack on superstition see C73-18/9/20/1/2/9/36.

21. Walter Kaufman, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist (New Jersey, 1950, 4th edition 1974) says Nietzsche does not try to solve problems so much as to 'outgrow' them by analysing their terms and showing them to be merely the illusion of a habit of thought (p.82).

as each article selects three or four items from the week's news and exposes the prejudices inherent in the treatment they have received in the press, revealing that 'everything is perfectly simple' beneath the apparent complications created by customary ways of thought. While he uses the column to attack the continuing abuse of power by politicians, churchmen, trade union leaders and the like, and occasionally criticises the laziness and anti-intellectual philistinism of 'the man in the street' directly, his main target is the daily press. This policy is active from the opening section of the series, where the report is quoted of a man who, arrested for fighting, refused to name his opponent because he felt personally responsible:

Now this story, told in any company of men, would be recognised at once as English in the authentic tradition; a variation on the noble commonplace of fair play. But reported in the press it appears literally extravagant. Why is this? It is simply because we are unaccustomed to seeing in print nowadays a phrase showing generosity or magnanimity. We shall look in vain in the Press for the parallel of this police-court sentiment. But on the other hand we shall find everything that is antithetic to it, we shall see the Press not only refusing to acknowledge that it is wrong when it is wrong, but even refusing to admit that anyone else is right when he is right. The truth is that the Press has made meanness a public imperative, so that collective generosity now appears to be against the public advantage. We cannot afford public magnanimity, it implies. Government is altogether too serious a matter for justice. And these degraded values have been accepted by us, almost insensibly. The newspapers spread them wherever they go. Already unquestioning magnanimity is found most easily among those who are called illiterate — among those who do not read the newspapers.

The assumption of apparent naivety in asking a basic question in elementary vocabulary ('Why is this?') and answering it with highly contentious declarations cast in a form that implies complete naturalness ('It is simply because...') underlies the step-by-step exposure of journalistic technique. The aim is to create a double awareness: not only must the case in question be seen differently, but the process by which the mistaken impression was created and fostered must be understood in order to prevent similar recurrences. Consequently, the column deals with the workings of the press in some detail:

Imagine, then, that our citizen at the Elephant and Castle gets his news every evening by the 'Evening News' (because it arrives first); he discovers, or worse still, he does not discover, that he has become somehow or other accustomed to it; its sentiments and ideas 'grow' upon him; he finds himself repeating them; he insensibly takes sides; he is 'influenced'. It is being slick that gets a paper read; it is being read habitually that gives a paper 'influence'. The 'ideas' that it expresses? These do not matter in the least. The man in the street is indeterminate, absolutely impartial about ideas: he 'believes' in those which he hears most habitually. (C73-53)²²

In order to make the 'citizen' realise the extent to which he is being manipulated, 'Our Generation' widens the attack to demonstrate that these reiterated ideas may well have their source in the operations of other institutions equally committed to maintaining the passivity of the

22. The Press also comes under explicit attack for abusing its power by propagandising shallow thought and values, acting as agents of repression, in C73-1/2/4/5/6/8/9/10/1/2/3/4/5/23/4/7/34/5/8/9/42/5/6/7/51/2/3/5/6/7/64/7/70/7/82/6/8/92. In some of these articles, the press is the major or secondary topic in several sections of the week's piece.

individual through buttressing superstitious modes of thought.

Politicians, for example, are shown to be inefficient, self-seeking and dishonest; yet the mood of the column is optimistic, since each falsity can be exposed by the method of analysis it uses. For example, a speech by Churchill on unemployment is analysed at some length:

Now consider for a moment the phraseology of this extraordinary passage, for the phraseology certainly gives more away than the sense; in political speeches at present, indeed, it always does, for where nothing is said, and always the same nothing, the only concrete thing we can seize upon is the style, which no doubt is the politician. Well, then, it is 'not quite fair' to say that the Government has done nothing to relieve the misery of its own citizens! It is almost fair, we are to assume; the Government has not altogether neglected the chief thing it exists for, the rendering of justice to every section of the people: therefore no one has a right to cast blame upon it. 'Some harsh expressions had been used' about the Government. This is hardly the thing, we must admit; but then, when we remember it, is not the condition of the unemployed, too, harsh and hard to bear, and does not the impotence of the Government make it harsher? Is not the Government's action, or failure to act, more harsh than any 'expressions' which can be used about it? We cannot be accused of inventing an intellectual subtlety in believing this to be so. But wait. The Government harsh? You will change your mind when you hear that it has given £105,000,000 to the unemployed, and some of that out of its own Exchequer. That is at any rate kindness, if it is not exactly self-sacrifice, and what conceivable emergency could arise that would make self-sacrifice to a British Government, or to the British monied classes, conceivable as a pressing necessity? Not, apparently, even the present distress, which is 'unexampled in British history'. But, after all, self-sacrifice should be the last way of dealing with a practical problem; we should only share our riches with the poor, after we have tried, and failed, to make the poor rich. And it is not their lack of charity, but their ineffect-

iveness, that makes the Government hated and despised to-day.

(C73-49)²³

By this mid-point in the series the technique has become assured, with a profusion of quotation marks and italicisations foregrounding the phrases which 'a moment's' deliberation is sufficient to expose. Simply expressed questions (for example, 'Is not the Government's action, or failure to act, more harsh than any "expression" which can be used about it?') are still opposed to the vacuous loquacity of the reported speech, and the hint of Douglasite economics at the end ('after we have tried, and failed, to make the poor rich') is presented as the realistic concrete progression from the abstract quality of charity.

'Our Generation' also attempts to make its readers conscious of more generalised and pervasive aspects of the same underlying dependence on 'superstition'. For example, when a government poster is discussed, its significance as a cultural and political phenomenon is revealed:

The disastrous state of men's moods is reflected in the recruiting posters which have everywhere been stuck up once the miners went on strike. We are each asked, in large letters, 'How can I help the nation?': and the reply is given: 'By joining the National Defence Force'. Here again the dead call to the dead, and with the certainty of a response. The nation has not asked, is not expected, to understand the position of the miners, or to come to a decision of its own. One does not 'help the nation' by striving to get justice done, but by ensuring that everything shall be as it was before. Injustice as usual; and let force, starvation, endurance — anything which is not mental or spiritual — decide the issue.

(C73-24)

23. Politicians and labour leaders are also the target in C73-8/10/37/8/41/50/7/66/7/9/71/2/83/4/92.

This distinction between new ideas as living and superstitions as 'dead', 'left-over' notions becomes a motif of the series, and is frequently invoked when the Church is being discussed, as, for example, in an earlier paragraph of the same column:

The debate in the House of Lords the other day on the new Divorce Act shows that the Church though dead is not powerless. Bishops came out of their holes in a legion; 'there was an imposing array of spiritual peers', the Daily Express said; an array of dead hands, we should add, lifted, as they can only be, to destroy where they have no longer the power to create. There is something weird, almost preternatural, in this sudden mustering of the clergy; and it warns us plainly of a danger which we always forget, though it should be a commonplace: that dead hands are in our society more powerful than the hands of the living... Has a reason for anything more grotesque been given at any time by a prelate of the Church than that which the Archbishop of Canterbury gave in support of the Bill as it was first introduced? He said, in effect, 'that as the measure in no way changed the grounds for divorce, he would not oppose it'. Religion as usual: everything as usual. (73-24)²⁴

Although the column scrupulously remains within the limits of its self-imposed task of clearing the channels of communication, it is not presumed that 'Our Generation' is the sole agent of this process. Artists, especially those popularly regarded as being avant-garde, can also be enlisted as allies in the same endeavour, as, for example, when all the representatives of the opposition are enjoined to watch modern dance:

The presence of Madame Isadora Duncan in London at present gives everyone the opportunity to know a standard of noble feeling and beautiful movement. To watch Madame Duncan is to realise how .

24. For further instances of criticism of the Church (often in the person of Dean Inge), see C73-8/11/22/3/4/5/7/30/8/42/3/4/54/73/5/8/90.

universally meretricious our habitual emotions are; how rare is the capacity to feel purely and justly. Every public man, every politician, every clergyman, every journalist, should be made to watch her dancing until they began to realise what justice in feeling is; and justice established there, justice in thought and in action would follow. (C73-24)

This passage invokes the premise that the natural and immediate consequence of 'justice in feeling' would be 'justice in thought and action', so representing the totalising view of the individual held by The New Age. But it also reveals further assumptions about the readership of the paper. That the form of that just action will, equally naturally and immediately, be the implementation of Douglasism is hinted at within 'Our Generation' and is implicit throughout the column by virtue of its appearing in that magazine; but all the profusion of evidence against the existing system assembled in the series and in the periodical as a whole cannot compensate for the lack of a plan of definite action in Social Credit theory itself. This absence suggests that the sense of hollowness which undermines the optimism of The New Age was probably as perceptible a phenomenon to contemporary readers as it is to those examining the paper with the benefit of hindsight; but it also carries the more immediate implication that writers for the magazine must presume that its readers simply do not need to be told how to bring reforms about. They write as if assured that they speak to the kind of people who require only to be convinced on the theoretical level because, by virtue of their education and their position in society, they already understand how to operate changes in the system and have the power to introduce whichever alterations they may wish to see.

This view of their audience was the explanation favoured by the New Age circle for the paper's small sales and consequently constant financial difficulties. Muir and Pound were among the few contributors to receive payment for their work: and although the circulation was estimated at between two and three thousand in 1919,²⁵ the editorial of 12 August 1920 stated that since it was no longer possible to continue publishing at a loss, the number of pages per issue would have to be reduced from sixteen to twelve from the next week. Factual records that might give access to information about the readers, such as subscription lists, are not available, but there is some evidence of the image of those for whom the paper was designed which was held by those associated with it. For example, the autobiographical claims that Muir had been embarrassed by a remark of Orage's to the effect that the paper was written 'by gentlemen for gentlemen' (Auto, p.123), and that The Guildsmen attempted to mitigate the exclusive note struck by The New Age (Auto, p.148), may suggest a sense of solidarity with the working class vexed by Muir's later social rise: but this does not invalidate the import of the quotations. The New Age undoubtedly belonged to a sector of the intellectual cultural and political avant-garde, a position illustrated by Willa's claim that she was dismissed from her job not because she married but because even the principals of a London college could not bring themselves to employ the wife of a man who published his apparent atheism in We Moderns (Belonging, p.26), and highlighted by Hixson's note that the paper was banned from the United States mail service for carrying subversive ideas (Light Dust of Fame, p.101). But this did not necessarily abolish the elements of

25. Cumberland, Set Down in Malice, p.130.

class prejudice and discrimination within Orage's ideology. Moreover, that these notional 'gentlemen' were supposed to be in positions of responsibility, authority and power was stated with some pride in Cumberland's account of the paper: he concedes that the readership may be numerically small,

but the men and women who read it are men and women who count — people who welcome daring and original thought, who hold important positions in the civic, social, political and artistic worlds, and who eagerly disseminate the seeds of thought they pick up from The New Age. Tens of thousands have been influenced by this paper who have never even heard its name. It does not educate the masses directly: it reaches them through the medium of its few but exceedingly able readers. (Set Down in Malice, p.130)

With his background as a self-educated clerk, Muir can be seen to represent only a minor section of the paper's readership.

Writers for The New Age already had to work against the general difficulties of an avowedly intellectual periodical in a magazine market increasingly devoted to popularised trivia since the establishment of a mass audience of the barely literate through the operation of the 1870 Education Act;²⁶ but the role of the paper within the scheme of Douglasism created special difficulties. Since the function of The New Age was educative and its success was to be measured by its ability to

26. That 'Our Generation' was well aware of the market pressures on The New Age is shown early in the series:

'Everyone must have noticed the alteration in the illustrations upon magazine covers during the last few years. I stopped before a book-stall the other day, and among a score or so of magazines with illustrated covers only three had the representation of anything else than a woman's head — I think they had pictures of trains, or trees, or some other irrelevancy. Ten years ago the public taste was different.' (C73-4)

convert its readership, the narrowness of the social backgrounds from which that readership — the English bourgeois intelligentsia — was thought to be drawn imposed further restrictions on the writers. Because Muir's work was justified by its ability to change selected elements in the ideology of that class, he had to be constantly aware of all its aspects and the manner in which they inter-related, in order to shape his articles into the most effective instrument of propaganda. And he could not afford to prejudice his case by antagonising areas of that ideology apparently 'irrelevant' to Douglasism.

As assistant editor, Muir must have been particularly conscious of these pressures. The reduction in pages of 1920 occurred almost precisely in the middle of his time in the office: and his commitment to Social Credit must have been given an intensified sense of urgency by the prospect of the paper from which he derived the largest proportion of his income failing. His response is to create in 'Edward Moore' a figure, a persona, without any of the elements of his own identity which might conflict with the ideology of his audience. Speaking as one of their own, who shares their background, habits of thought, mannerisms — even their prejudices — he encourages them to accept his reading of their apparently shared society by reducing still further the element of upheaval and revolution implied by a commitment to Social Credit.

Muir moved to London because there was no magazine to match the seriousness of The New Age in Scotland; but the incongruent element of his identity to be most consistently denied in 'Our Generation' is his Scottishness. 'Moore' refers again and again to the English in the first person plural. Isolated examples of this may appear relatively innocent, the result of an easy assimilation to living in London, as

when he writes that 'it may be that we English need Dostoyevsky, his profundity, even his disorder, his "pathology", more than other peoples' (C73-55). But within the context of the column, where English culture is deliberately contrasted with Scottish on several occasions, it would be simplistic to conclude that Muir or 'Moore' had simply risen above nationalism. And these comparisons are drawn throughout the run of the series. For example, he notes quite early that there is no English equivalent of Burns' Day:

The celebration of Burns' Day all over Scotland reminds one more unwillingly than ever that England, in spite of her splendid literature, has no central popular figure in her culture, no man of genius whose writings are as familiar to her as popular sayings. It is less her misfortune than her fault, for she has writers in abundance who can be understood by everyone, and who are English as characteristically as Burns is Scotch. The divorce between the English nation and its written and spoken culture is surely almost a unique phenomenon; we have forgotten even the minimum of popular culture which half-savage peoples possess — we have forgotten our very ballads. It is strange how little this loss incommodes us.(C73-13)

'Moore' clearly knows more about Scottish culture than the reader might have expected, but the use of 'we' removes any suggestion that he is other than English. On other occasions, it is suggested that 'Moore' has lived in Scotland and observed its mores. For example, he invokes a contrast with Scotland to illustrate English attitudes to poverty, concluding that

in more realistic countries, on the Continent, even in Scotland, the same desperate attachment to the empty and yet significant badge of respectability is not to be seen. But in the renunciation, open and simple, of respectability and all its works, these peoples gain a dignity more real, because more natural, than that of their

brothers in England, the dignity not of a class or of a convention, but of humanity itself. It is really a question whether in England there exists this sense of humanity. (C73-14)

Similarly, commenting on the importance of the Russian Ballet's visit, he quotes Stendhal's reflection that 'the Scotch dance with a joy and an abandon unknown in London', noting

and that is as true to-day as it was a hundred years ago. Those who know Scotland and have lived in it for however short a lifetime become conscious, when they find themselves in England, of this English unwillingness, amounting to refusal, to get out of themselves, to forget themselves absolutely and unconditionally... Why have we lost, not merely the art, but the ability to dance? Perhaps the psycho-analysts can tell us. We are delighted, almost taken out of ourselves, in seeing the Russians dance, but, nevertheless, we should be ashamed to dance like them. (C73-32)

There is just a moment in this passage where 'Moore', talking of having spent 'however short a lifetime' in Scotland and of then 'finding' a difference in England, seems to be on the brink of stating his Scottishness: to use 'lifetime' instead of merely 'time' implies the sense of having been born north of the border, while the insistence on the less personal plural form suggests a general unease in discussing his relationship with Scotland which is stamped out by the reversion to the use of 'we'.

The comparison is not made in terms of institutions, since all these would be liable to change once Social Credit were brought in. For example, Scottish lawyers are discussed not because they operate a distinct legal system, but for their higher level of general culture ('Even in Scotland a lawyer has respect for things which he does not understand; but for an Englishman not to understand something is an indictment of it and not of himself.' C73-40); and the Kirk is

neglected while the phenomenon of the contemporary east coast revival is examined (C73-62). Such comparisons create within the column an awareness of Scotland's separate culture which makes it impossible to see references to 'Moore' as one of the English other than as attempts specifically to deny his Scottishness.

Apparently casual use of this 'we English' technique recurs virtually to the end of 'Our Generation': considering the alleged humourlessness of the English in C73-82 'Moore' writes that 'as a people we have perhaps a stronger sense of humour than any other', and as late as C73-89 one of the 'few truths about England' which a German magazine's report is said to convey is that 'we are as a people becoming more and more stitched and sewn up in routine', for example

This consistency of standpoint means that, within the context of 'Our Generation', an article which ignores the distinctions between England and Scotland assumes special significance. For example, when 'Moore' writes of the qualities which The Spectator attributes to being educated at Eton he argues that

these the English possess as a race. What distinguishes us as a people is precisely 'the precious gift of character', 'the gift of knowing the true man from the false', 'the power to lead and to be led'; and these will be found as easily in a Clyde shipyard or a Lancashire cotton mill as in the class who have been initiated into the unintelligent mysteries of Eton. (73-4)

Referring to Clydesiders as English and assuming that all the variations of culture outside London can be collected under a couple of stereotyped images is redolent of the metropolitan English middle-class attitude, reflecting a characteristic lack of awareness of their political and constitutional position: and the point is that this insensitivity is

not the subject of 'Moore's' attack. Rather, he adopts here one habit of thought of this class — their lack of real concern about nationalism and regionalism — in order to encourage their agreement and complicity in his criticism of the upper-class, itself drawing on another middle-class prejudice in order that he might lead them, ultimately, to Social Credit.

The image of the aristocracy in 'Our Generation', of a class indulging in irrational and inhumane behaviour as a part of belonging to a residual element of an outdated social structure and contributing nothing to the improvement of the country held to be the aim of his audience, is typified by the reiterated denunciation of fox-hunting. The major premise of the attack is that this activity is no longer part of the true tradition of the English way of life, and this cushions the conservatism of the bourgeois while suggesting fairly massive changes to that tradition in his implicit advocacy of Douglasism. It is typical of the paper's stress on the inter-relatedness of the elements of culture that a major instance of this complaint involves comment on the prominence of The New Age, developments in literature,²⁷ and appeals to the notion of 'tradition', as well as a repudiation of the sport

27. The condemnation of brutality in the name of the 'true', 'humane' tradition anticipates the argument of 'The Assault on Humanism' (C133) and Transition (1926).

itself and of the principles of those who follow it.²⁸

This strategy of adopting the prejudices of his audience may account in part for Muir's advocacy of 'World Affairs'. He states quite simply that 'if the World Association for Adult Education were by a miracle to adopt the idea which my colleagues, 'M.M. Cosmoi', have outlined in these pages, no one knows what a transformation it might effect ' (C73-9). The idea that 'Cosmoi's' philosophy is 'miraculous' makes it clear that 'Moore' approves the column; but the 'transformation' for which he hopes is not of so obscure a nature as he suggests.

Talking the next week of the decision to propose Lord Reading for Indian

28. 'It is a pleasure to remember, after reading Mr Masfield's latest affirmation, that a decade ago, when every other paper was acclaiming his "Nan", The New Age almost alone found in it a vein of brutality. Writing of fox-hunting and the fox, Mr Masfield says: "To all Englishmen who have lived in a hunting country hunting is in the blood and the mind is full of it. It is the most beautiful and the most stirring sight to be seen in England." There is an aesthetic judgment! Fox-hunting "is a sport loved and followed by both sexes, all ages, and all classes. At a fox-hunt, and nowhere else in England, except at a funeral (our italics), can you see the whole of the land's society brought together, focussed for the observer as the Canterbury Pilgrims were for Chaucer." Really, we are a very gruesome people, or else Mr Masfield has a very gruesome taste. It remains only to make fox-hunting something moral, and that is easy. "Hunting makes more people happy than anything I know. When people are happy together I am quite certain that they build up something eternal, something both beautiful and divine, which weakens the power of all evil things upon this life of men and women." And of foxes, perhaps? No doubt the slaughter of animals in the Roman amphitheatre made people "happy," but history does not tell us that "something eternal, something both beautiful and divine" was built upon it. Our happiness hangs, it seems, on the brush of a fox. Chaucer's pilgrims gathered together to keep alive dead saints; we congregate to kill foxes. The picture is, fortunately, grotesque. Fox-hunting is a class pleasure simply and baldly, and to call it national and speak hypocritically about it is to fight against the time when common decency to animals will be the rule. Fortunately, in this as in everything else, Mr Masfield is not in the tradition of English poetry. The English tradition is humane.'
- (C73-33)

Viceroyalty, he notes simply that Jews are ineligible: 'as the writers of World Affairs have insisted, they are not members of the Aryan race, and cannot undiluted be made instruments for the Aryanisation of the world.' (C73-10) These comments show that 'Moore's' assumption of the ethos of the paper was more than conventional politeness towards his fellow writers. Using the column as a standard and reference in 'Our Generation' signals a much deeper commitment to the principles for which 'Cosmoi' produced his propagandising sector of The New Age. The anti-semitism of the magazine was such that a book reviewer could refer without censure to 'the profound but unconscious realisation that the creatures called Christians are being drained of their life-blood by the vile genius of the Jews' (3 February 1921 p.163), so that 'Moore's' implicit condoning of the column which most frequently expresses this attitude further endorses his claim to be aligned with his audience.

Similarly, he adopts their convention of regarding the working-class, however sympathetically, as undifferentiated 'masses'. Individual labour leaders such as Clynes are singled out and dealt with in the same way as politicians like Churchill and Lloyd George or churchmen like Dean Inge; but the class as a whole is discussed in terms which reveal a sense of bourgeois incompatibility, as when he discusses the true end of extending education:

What reading must do for the workmen of this country is not to polish but to quicken them. It must not merely initiate them in a convention, however praiseworthy; it must reveal what the human spirit has attained, and what it is still capable of doing. They will add a cubit to their stature not by relinquishing one tradition to take up another but by a rebirth, a spiritual discovery, and after that by the creation of a tradition from within. Otherwise they will simply cease to be dead workmen in order to become dead gentlemen.

(C73-1)

The notion that this revolution might be brought about by reading underlies the entire enterprise of The New Age, but the impersonal and abstract terms in which he refers to 'a new tradition', 'a spiritual rebirth' and 'the creation of a tradition' without giving any details of what he means by such conservative platitudes distances the prospect of its occurrence almost as much as the Biblical cadences in the phraseology of 'a cubit to their stature'.

This distancing is typical of a tone of cynicism, always present in the column as a characteristic of the persona, which becomes increasingly prevalent as a mark of his disillusion as the failure of 'Our Generation' and The New Age becomes increasingly apparent. It begins as a note of flippancy, usually applied to the last and shortest item in each article as light relief after the more stern preceding analyses, and implying that 'Moore' and his readers, being of the same mind, have joined a pact to ridicule the stupidity, impercipience and slowness of those beyond the extended circle of the paper and its readers. It adds an element of variety, and a confirmation of being on the right side for habitual readers of the paper. For example, when talking of the ease of prohibiting fox-hunting, he adds with mock-ruefulness,

Still, it is very easy to see where humane legislation for the sake of animals would very soon lead. Only the public would be hit by the prohibition of entertainments with performing animals; but what would happen if the aristocracy were not let loose in the proper season upon a fox here and there, with the collaboration of their only remaining admirers the horses and hounds (but we forget the House of Commons) it pains us to think. (C73-32)

Butter claims that there is a 'flagging' of enthusiasm (M & P, p.92)

towards the end of the series, but there is no evidence for this in the main sections of the texts, bar a tendency to deal with two or three topics in greater depth rather than retaining the old prescription of three or four per week.²⁹ Even the last article gives no reason to suspect that 'Our Generation' will not continue confidently until success is achieved. But while this flippancy of tone first signals 'Moore's' certainty of his position as prophet of the coming system, beginning as a mark of the assurance which permits him to be occasionally less than the wholly sober, respectable, responsible citizen he is usually at such pains to appear, it gradually becomes more bitter, and less witty, as time passes. Complaining of popular philistinism on the tercentenary of Dante's death, for instance, he notes that

only in so far as, after six hundred years, Dante happens to have become an item of news are our newspaper editors interested in him. The Dante celebration, simply as a celebration, without its meaning, without an understanding of what it is all about: that satisfies them. But they are adepts at rendering Hamlet without including the Prince of Denmark; in fact they prefer Hamlet in that state. (C73-50)

To finish on this note not only fails to give a plan for remedial action, it seems to despair of any improvement being achieved. Two thirds of the way through the series this pessimism becomes explicit: 'the individual is divided against himself', he writes 'and that is why everything is ineffectual' (C73-62); and he does not exclude 'Our Generation' from the indictment. The division of the individual against himself, of 'Moore' against Muir, the price of denying the very

29. For example, C73-75/6.

experience of being a working-class Scot which had brought him to attempt to win the allegiance of the powerful middle-class, was not sufficient to compensate for the theoretical softness which caused Social Credit to fail to win the necessary support. In June 1921 it had seemed as if people were beginning to respond: 'these notes have begun to succeed,' he writes,

they are arousing a little opposition, and during the last few days two letters have reached me expressing it. (C73-33)

Two letters might mark the beginning of debate, but it never swelled to anything more than a beginning: and as a return on some two years' work, within a context that made the return the justifying factor, it must have been bitterly disappointing. For all the Arnoldian echoes and references,³⁰ 'Our Generation' sought to dispense not 'sweetness and light' but Douglasite propaganda, and the failure of Social Credit marked the end of Muir's commitment to political activism.

It did not, of course, mark the end of his career. 'We Moderns' had been his introduction to writing for the English periodical, but his time helping to edit The New Age demanded that he learn the finest details of the ideology and functioning of the system of which it was a part and on which he was financially dependant. The measure of his success in this is debateable: on what might be regarded as the 'public' level, The New Age survived against the pressures of the market but only with a reduction in the number of pages, circulation figures which may have remained stable but which almost certainly did not grow, and an increasing reliance on the established structure of the paper that amounted to mechanical repetition of the set format.³¹ The

30. For example in C73-11/25/41/57/63/70/86.

31. See appendix 1(a).

inability of Social Credit theory to break through to the public it required may also be accounted in part a failure of the editors of The New Age. On the contrasting level of his 'personal' career, however, the achievement was remarkable. Close comparison of 'Our Generation' with the editorial 'Commentaries' written by T.S. Eliot very soon afterwards for The Criterion shows how completely 'Moore' assumes the concerns, manners and style of the avant-garde sector of English periodicals; and does, indeed, suggest that the relationship between Muir's writing and that of other alienated intellectuals from 'peripheral' cultures seeking to revitalise the centre whose corruption had disappointed them was, in the early 1920s, at least symbiotic.³² Although he committed the occasional breach of etiquette,³³ Muir's awareness of his position was very shrewd and sure. His response to it was embodied in the literary achievement of creating the persona of 'Edward Moore' and maintaining it virtually unblemished for the duration of the series for which it was designed even although he was living abroad for almost half of its run. The effects of losing this persona, along with the political strategy it had personified in 'Our Generation' can be seen in the last series of articles Muir wrote for The New Age, 'Causerie de Jeudi'.

32. For a detailed comparison of the two series see appendix 1(b).

33. For example, when he incurred Eliot's disapproval by referring to the Criterion's 'school of criticism' (C374): see chapter III.2.

By September 1922, when Orage gave up the editorship of The New Age and 'Our Generation' came to an end, the confidence gained from his success in the American periodical The Freeman combined with the danger of being confused with the new editor, Arthur Moore, had already encouraged Muir to publish two poems as 'Edwin Muir' in The New Age.³⁴ That his writing changes with the abandonment of the pseudonym signalling his use of a persona, and that this change was objectively noted by contemporary readers, is confirmed by the Editor's note to the fifth article in the new series:

Style is apparently an elusive thing. One or two correspondents have written to ask why Mr Edward Moore no longer writes in The New Age. The explanation is that, to avoid confusion with the editor, 'Mr Edward Moore' is now writing under his own name, Edwin Muir. (C142-E)³⁵

Since 'Causerie de Jeudi' began in November 1922, only a few weeks after the end of 'Our Generation', so sudden and complete a change in style as to render his column unrecognisable to the followers of his earlier writings cannot be accounted for in terms of gradual maturing of technique or increasing sophistication of approach. And

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34. These were 'Rebirth' (C127) and 'Ballad of Eternal Life' (C131).
 35. Although Mellown's Bibliography lists all twenty-one articles with dates, he assigns them only one overall number, C142. The appended initials run chronologically and full listings are given in the bibliographical appendix.

although 'Causerie de Jeudi' is largely ignored by Muir's critics, including Butter,³⁶ the nature of its differences from 'Our Generation' suggests that it embodies the almost violent rejection of the ethos of his longest series in The New Age and signifies his temporary withdrawal from active political debate on the failure of Douglasism.

The title of the new series is only the most immediate indication of the altered approach, 'Thursday Chats' suggesting far less seriousness and urgency than the appeal to personal relevance in 'Our Generation', and the use of French acting as an extension of the element of distancing cynicism that was growing in 'Edward Moore'. 'Causerie de Jeudi' does, however, accurately reflect the piecemeal constitution of the series, both externally and internally. 'Our Generation' had only three minor slips in continuity over nearly two years,³⁷ but in their nine month span the twenty-one 'Causerie' articles are quite irregular in appearance. And where 'Our Generation' articles consisted of three or four sections, often interrelated and treated at some length, 'Causerie' returns to the haphazard collection of aphorisms and short, brittle paragraphs that characterised 'We Moderns'. The first article, for example, is punctuated with one- and two-liners such as:

To guess is more difficult than to reason.

The poet is not born but re-born.

The rule is solemn, the exception is witty. (C142-A)

36. Butter merely notes that 'between October 1922 and January 1924 thirty-one more prose contributions by him appeared, mostly under the heading "Causerie de Jeudi" and mostly on literary subjects' (M & P, p.92).

37. There were no articles on 27 October 1921, 9 February or 9 March 1922. (Mellown, Bibliography, p.61).

This style is maintained through most of the series, never being extended beyond the length of such extracts as these:

It is the shallow who long for profundity; to the profound depth is a necessity and a torment. They long to escape from it and to lie on the surface.

The Dangers of Criticism:- It is more difficult to judge an aphorism than an epic. (C142-B)

The heretic is a dogmatist without a dogma. (C142-C)

Changing the strategy employed in 'Our Generation', Muir attempts to explain the theory behind this series explicitly, in the first article: 'writers who stimulate, who incite to thought, are of three classes', he claims:

Of the first are those who give a paradoxical turn to a platitude: these are useful, for they make the platitude live. Re-stated by them, it surprises us, and surprise is a sign of vitality; if a thought takes us unawares, we immediately begin to think about it.

But this programme of short, sharp attacks on established ways of thought is less effective than 'Our Generation's' attempts to combat 'superstition' for two reasons. The examples lose most of their force when the paradoxes are safely contained in a set column, neatly boxed off like a set of intellectual riddles from the political and social concerns of the magazine and, with no basis in contemporary affairs, having no reference to them save by contrasting juxtaposition; and they are utterly dependent on the wit of the author for their existence, not encouraging the readers to learn a technique of analysis available to any member of the audience, but asking them to applaud the extraordinary skill of Edwin Muir. The lack of sustained

exposition and argument means that the column is full of hard little nuggets of thought apparently conjured from no-where save the talent of the writer, and it is this trait that most deeply marks the divide between 'Causerie' and the democratic drive in the painstaking, empirical process of investigation of 'Our Generation'.

This regression to the mode of 'We Moderns' is itself an index of political withdrawal from the ethos of The New Age, since it returns to work typical of the easier, less totally committed and less political relationship he had had with the paper when it was held at the distance between Glasgow and London. Examined in isolation from the overall development of his career, 'Causerie' would seem to suggest that Muir was simply running out of steam.

And as the series haltingly progresses, even the weak and disappointing early justification breaks down as Muir gradually gives up the idea of shocking the reader into new thought, and starts to write at more length on his own pet subjects. There is a much greater concern with the 'philosophical' rather than the practical aspects of the topics with which he deals. For example, the first article includes an attack on the stereotypes of classification that govern our thought:

It is dangerous to think of men as mere classes, whether it is economic, social or spiritual, for that is bound to lead to the justification of one class, and generally a small one, and the condemnation of all the others. It is dangerous to think of men as nations, or even races, for then one can find for the overwhelming mass of mankind no raison d'être except the conditional one that without them a particular race or a single nation could not have existed. It is dangerous to think of some ideal society in the future towards which our own life is moving, for that makes our whole life relative and deprives it of its individual and

unique truth. It is dangerous to regard the primitive races still existing as a sort of irrelevancy in our world, and to be concerned with Europe only and not with Asia and even with Africa.

(C142-A)

The tone of calm reasonableness, the slow build-up of what tension there is through the repetition of the same sentence structure, and the general economy of tone, all contribute to the feeling that Muir is merely pointing out established truths. But the platitude is turned to paradox in the end of the passage:

It is dangerous to do all these things, and yet it is impossible not to do them. No man is great if these assumptions, along with the mystical negation of them, are not in him. Every great man incarnates in himself what mankind has attained - and has not attained - and in doing that he makes mankind irrelevant and at the same time in the highest sense irrelevant. It is the mystery of greatness.

(C142-A)

It is the constant use of abstractions that is so wearing about this extract - and about the series as a whole. Mankind, mysteries, greatness and negations, combined with verbal tricks implying 'highest' and other degrees of irrelevance, amount to a drastic retreat from the kind of writing he had been producing during the previous three years. Throughout the entire series, there is no suggestion of it being possible to alleviate any situation discussed. The cynicism amounts to a total lack of sympathy and betrays a complete loss of faith in human potential capability: he claims, for example, that

The sinner sins because he can sin well; the moralist exhorts him not to sin because he exhorts well; the psychologist looks on and points this out because he can point it out well. How clever this makes life!

(C142-A)

and that

In our time, when ideas lie in such heaps in every man's cellar, a new philosophy can only be a new filing system.

(C142-B)

If the persona behind 'Our Generation' was becoming disillusioned, the persona behind 'Causerie de Jeudi' is a dilettante. Hoffman (C142-N) and Spengler (C142-Q), typically introduced, were important European writers unjustly neglected by the parochial English magazines, and Muir's work in resisting such prejudice was undoubtedly valuable. But that task of widening awareness could have been performed with equal, if not greater, success in occasional articles without disrupting the more specialised endeavour supposedly the aim of 'Causerie'. By the end of the series those pieces are, as Mellow describes them, little more than 'disguised reviews' (Bibliography p.64): and, as in the case of the consideration of Georgian poetry (C142-R), unenthusiastically written reviews at that. 'Mr Davies', he says, is one of the most natural and delightful of minor poets' (C142-R). Again, it would appear that Muir was simply burned out as a critic.

Yet the dating of 'Causerie' makes this an untenable conclusion. 1922-1923 was the period of the start to a phase of great expansion in his writing. From the knowledge of the English periodical gained through his work for The New Age, he was able to tailor his writing for other magazines and become a highly successful and extremely prolific literary journalist. The 'Causerie' articles mark the beginning of this expansion; but they also mark the political decision to move away from political journalism into the safer world of the purely literary reviews, to write more narrowly about books — albeit a

wider range of books than almost any other critic of the time - at the expense of renouncing social and economic criticism. He may have carried with him residual elements of the idealism of The New Age, and he may have temporarily returned to the advocacy of Social Credit during the politically dangerous days of the 1930s, but a political commitment to any programme of reform was never again to be a structural principle in his work as it had been in 'Our Generation'.

Even this movement away from Douglasism could be argued to have been determined in part by Douglasism itself. If the persona of 'Causerie' is more cynical, more brilliant, aloof and élitist than the old 'Edward Moore', this is not merely a reflection of Muir's disillusionment at the failure of Social Credit to break through. These characteristics also reflect traits inherent in Douglasism itself. Although the Scheme was intended to bring about 'economic democracy' and a socialist state, its reliance was entirely upon the action of bourgeois individuals, and the expositions of the structure of the Douglasite system leaves little doubt that the bureaucratic organisation of the working class is to go on being handled by precisely this class:

Any or all business undertakings will be accepted for registration under an assisted price scheme... Undertakings unable to show a profit after five years' operation to be struck off the register... Unregistered firms will not be supplied with the necessary bill forms for treatment in this manner, with the result that their prices will be 25 per cent, at least, higher than those of registered firms. (It is obvious that the larger the discount rate can be made, the greater will be the handicap of the non-registered firms.)... For a period of five years after the initiation of this scheme, failure on the part of any individual

to accept employment in whatever trade, business or vocation he was classified in the last census, under conditions recognised as suitable to employment (unless exempted on a medical certificate), will render such individual liable to suspension of benefit in respect of the national dividend.³⁸

A strong central authority to administer the distribution of credits is essential to the Scheme. Vast numbers of civil servants are to be employed (for 4 hours a day to ensure fair job-sharing) on this task (Social Credit, p.210), and it is therefore clear that its implications of an organic community were founded on an acknowledgement of the rights of that community over the individual. Muir's later emphasis on the lack of an organic community in Scotland depends as much on the intellectual inheritance of the New Age Scheme, with all its implicit authoritarianism, as on his experience of pre-industrial Orkney; and the move Muir made towards the cultural centre in his abandonment of The New Age was itself an instance of fulfilling the centralism implicit in Social Credit theory.

Moreover, while the ideology of the paper had been the determining factor influencing both the form and the content of his writing, The New Age had also demonstrated to Muir the absolute necessity of developing a relationship with the existing system of economics, through the instructive example of Pound's career. When Pound wrote and reviewed for Orage as 'B.H. Dias' and 'William Atheling', he too was using acceptable personae. These are columns of interesting — though not startling — criticism; but in those written under his own name he goes to the opposite extreme, writing to emphasise the differences

38. Douglas, Social Credit (1924; 3rd edition, revised and enlarged, 1933), p.208-11.

between his background and that of his readers with a zest that suggests a deliberate attempt to shock the audience out of their customary social expectations. In 1913, for example, he writes of his plans for an American Academy:

My proposal is of the simplest. I want not ten men but a hundred. I want not Rome, but New York or Chicago.

I want these hundred men chosen with regard to their intentions and capacities, not by an academic footrule.

I want them to be men who have done enough to show that their work is neither a passing whim nor a commercial predilection.

(29 May 1913, p.116)

In a long series of articles, he goes more radically against the metropolitan ethos and claims to be writing an account of the pioneering exploits of his immediate family. Such revelling in the differences between himself and the accepted mores of literary circles did him no good at all: in the early 1920s he seems to have been utterly dependent on Orage for his income. Other editors would not employ him. Muir, on the other hand, who did his best to seem to belong to the London circles in which he was moving and to the audience for which he assumed he was writing, consequently attracted the attention of Van Wyck Brooks and was offered the contract to review for The Freeman that enabled the travels on the continent to begin. The moral was clear. The parameters of these intellectual circles, for all their interest in new ideas, and however in advance of the rest of the society in which they functioned they might be, were just as rigid as any other social formation. Muir's assimilation of the rules won him The Freeman's money, and over the next eight years he was to exploit such knowledge of the material rules underlying the literary reviews to the full.

Chapter III :

Criticism, 1921 - 1928

1921	Began to write for <u>Freeman</u> August: to Prague		<u>New Age</u> , <u>Athenēum</u> <u>Freeman</u>
1922	March: to Hellerau		<u>New Age</u> , <u>Freeman</u>
1923	May: to Forte dei Marmi August: to Salzburg September: to Lucca October: to Salzburg December: to Vienna		<u>New Age</u> , <u>Freeman</u> , <u>Scottish Chapbook</u> , <u>Scottish Nation</u> , <u>Dial</u> , <u>Living Age</u>
1924	March: <u>Freeman</u> closed : to Sonntagberg July: to Montrose	<u>Latitudes</u>	<u>New Age</u> , <u>Freeman</u> <u>Nation</u> , <u>Dial</u> , <u>Observer</u> , <u>Evening Post</u> (NY), <u>Adelphi</u> , <u>Nation</u> (NY), <u>Saturday Review</u> , <u>Literary Digest</u> , <u>New Republic</u>
1925	January: to Penn October: to Montrose	<u>First Poems</u>	<u>Saturday Review</u> , <u>Nation</u> , <u>Dial</u> , <u>Nation</u> (NY), <u>Criterion</u> , <u>Calendar of Modern</u> <u>Letters</u> , <u>Living Age</u>
1926	March: to St Tropez October: to Menton	<u>Transition</u> <u>Chorus of the</u> <u>Newly Dead</u>	<u>Calendar of Modern</u> <u>Letters</u> , <u>Nation</u> , <u>Living Age</u> , <u>Adelphi</u> , <u>Calendar Quarterly</u>
1927	May: to Surrey	<u>The Marionette</u>	<u>Saturday Review</u> , <u>Calendar Quarterly</u> , <u>Nation</u>
1928	December: ceased reviewing	<u>The Structure</u> <u>of the Novel</u>	<u>Bookman</u> , <u>Nation</u> , <u>Atlantic Monthly</u> , <u>New Adelphi</u>

III 1

Muir's autobiographical account of the 1920s employs the same strategy as that used in talking of the earlier years when he was working primarily on The New Age. By naming chapters according to the places where he and his wife lived and travelled ('London', 'Prague', 'Dresden and Hellerau', 'Italy and Austria' and so on), he designs a travelogue backdrop to the continued concentration on the drama of his spiritual development, an emphasis which makes it seem unrelated to the other elements of his identity.

For instance, his description of their stay in Italy focuses on a recurring dream experienced in a hotel in Lucca, and he talks of it with the same attitude of naïve enthusiasm and wonder as he uses in relating his 'waking dreams' under psychoanalysis in London, demanding that readers will accord the manifestations of his subconscious the priority he assigns to them:

In the dream I was a young man of twenty, dressed in what seemed to be a renaissance costume, a closely fitting suit of black. I was waiting in a dark archway for the approach of someone; it was late in the night; the moon was up, but I was hidden in the shadow of the arch. Presently I heard a man's footsteps growing louder; as he passed I leapt out, filled with rage from head to foot, a sort of possession, and plunged my dagger into his breast. The warm blood spouted out, covering my hand; this always wakened me. Why I dreamt this dream, and why it came back to me night after night, I cannot think. (Auto, p.213)

Again, Muir, through the retelling of his dream, is making a propagandist point while denying that he has any awareness of such a process. By giving the most precise details at such length (the dark clothes, the lateness of the hour, the arch under which he hides from the moonlight)

he elevates this kind of experience above his literary work of the same period, the details of which are omitted; but by disclaiming any authority in interpreting the dream ('Why I dreamt this dream... I cannot think') he seeks to deny the ideological ordering that produces this elevation. That he is constantly advancing his own ideology in the autobiography becomes even clearer when he discusses Italian religious mores:

On the stone floor of the church old peasant women were kneeling in prayer, their faces streaming with tears as they gazed at the statue of their Lord. At the same time, not far off, a fair was in full swing, with booths displaying giants and dwarfs, clowns and conjurers. This was an immemorial part of the solemn day, and it seemed to us in no way incongruous. In the evening the results of a lottery were announced to the crackling of fireworks.

(Auto, p.213)

By stressing that he and Willa were outsiders — he writes of 'their Lord', and notes that the fair 'seemed to us in no way incongruous' — Muir pretends that he is an impartial observer neutrally recording the foreign manners he has witnessed abroad. But the emphasis on the all-embracing nature of Catholicism, with the fair and the procession as part of the same ceremony, is a major theme in his mature poetry and underlies the advocacy of an 'organic' community. Similarly, his reaction to the squalor of peasant conditions embodies a political attitude:

The gentleness and dignity of that family in that lonely place, the veil of flies hanging from the walls, bemused us as we walked on, and I became dimly aware of a good life which had existed there for many centuries before medicine and hygiene identified goodness with cleanliness.

(Auto, p.212)

Unlike the distrust of modern science familiarly attributed to Muir on the evidence of such poems such as 'The Horses' and 'After a Hypothetical War', this passage reveals an opposition, not to the dubious results of modern research in physics, say, but specifically to the medical sciences which have fought to prevent premature death through unnecessary infection. And it does so in the name of an undefinedly 'good' life identified with poverty and dirt and yet said to invoke the ideals — 'gentleness', 'dignity' — of the refined bourgeoisie. An attempt is made to hide the anti-humanist transcendentalism underlying this politely genteel primitivism by claiming that Muir was 'bemused' and only 'dimly aware', as if this described his consciousness not only on leaving the cottage but also while writing about it. The political conservatism is masked by the language used by the narrator, and it is denied that Muir is conscious of the ideological pressure which he exerts through applying it to determine the full operation of the text.

In the autobiography, where such recollections are emphasised because they are congruous with his later ideology, his contemporary writing is reduced to being merely the activity — hardly worthy of mention — that finances the travels around Europe; and its importance is said to be that it thereby smooths the way for the central spiritual progress. He notes that

we had a great deal of leisure, for living was cheap and I could make enough to keep us comfortably by writing two articles a month for The Freeman and a weekly article for The New Age.

(Auto, p.189)

But instead of discussing these articles, he immediately continues by

saying that 'it was the first time since I was fourteen that I had known what it was to have time for thinking and daydreaming' (Auto, p.189); and while, as usual, he tells us a lot about his dreams, his thoughts are merely disparaged.

For example, he claims that

except for the time I spent in writing my articles for the American Freeman, on which we lived, we had our days to ourselves...

Reading some of my articles for The Freeman written about that time, I see that I was very little concerned with the truth of what I said; I was simply letting my mind range freely among 'ideas', as if that were a sufficient end in itself. I had started the habit in Glasgow, where ideas were so scarce that any, good or bad, was a treasure to be prized. I had afterwards come under the influence of Orage, the most intelligent merchant of ideas of his time. But in Hellerau my imagination was beginning to waken after a long sleep, and the perceptions it promised were so much more real than those with which I had been trifling, that these no longer excited me. (Auto, p.197-200)

By tracing the source of these articles to Glasgow, Muir suggests that the intervening years spent working on The New Age were irrelevant to the development of his writing; it is almost implied that the pieces he sent to The Freeman from 1921 to 1924 were somehow tainted by an association with the horrors he describes in the industrial Scotland he left in 1919. And in this formation Muir then implicates Orage, referring to him as a 'merchant' of ideas (as if Orage were some kind of cynical profiteer), thereby devaluing the work without actually discussing its content, form or role in his career. The notion of conflict between his intellect and his imagination replays the favoured theme of a 'dissociation of sensibility', but in such a way as to make

it seem an exclusively personal matter without cultural reference or relevance — and to stress the value of the private over the public again. 'I was very little concerned with the truth of what I said' implies that he was intellectually irresponsible, as does the use of 'trifling'; and by putting 'ideas' in inverted commas he suggests that these have nothing to do with 'truth', so buttressing his transcendentalism. The confusion arising from the lack of definition in saying of his imagination that 'the perceptions it promised were so much more real' — as if comparative degrees of reality were attributable through some paradox that reversed the usual understanding of 'real' and 'imaginary' — completes the manoeuvre that distracts attention from the earlier work which he wishes to discredit by its relentless disparagement.

Again, the critics have followed Muir's lead in evaluating this area of his writing. There is no single study of the work of this period. Butter's chronicle follows the autobiography very closely, spending only about a page on Latitudes and that largely for the purpose of making a contrast with First Poems;¹ and despite his own judgement that 'in critical prose he was by the summer of 1924 approaching maturity, in poetry he was only a beginner' (M & P, p.94), the superior valuation of the latter leads him to devote almost ten times as much space to the verse. Similarly, Transition² is described as 'his most mature book yet, full of original perceptions and without the stridency and overstatement of his earlier writings' (M & P, p.110); but this totally unsubstantiated verdict is immediately followed by a long

1. Latitudes (1924); First Poems (1925).

2. Transition (1926).

quotation from a letter by Muir that emphasises the importance of his poetry at this time. Moreover Butter carefully makes explicit the autobiography's suggestion by saying that Muir's other writing for periodicals was merely 'bread-and-butter work' (M & P, p.108).

No curiosity seems to have been aroused by the reputation Muir had among his contemporaries in the 1920s as a critic. As it has been pointed out, Q.D. Leavis was almost apologetic in 1940 that she remembered Muir's earlier status (Scrutiny, IX, p.170-1): yet Willa reports as a simple accolade Leonard Woolf's telling Muir 'that his book reviews were the best The Nation had ever had' (Belonging, p.118); and although MacDiarmid was prone to claim more on the basis of promise than achievement for anyone he might recognise as a manifestation of the Renaissance, no objection seems to have been made when, in 1925, he dubbed Muir 'a critic incontestably in the first flight of contemporary critics of welt-literatur' (Contemporary Scottish Studies, p.906).

While the enthusiasms of contemporary writers always may prove to have been short-sighted, Muir's attempts to deter investigation of this period have succeeded in preventing any examination of this earlier feeling that he was doing important work. Yet even the apparently superficial evidence of the bibliographical listings suggests that these were years of great expansion, as he wrote on more varied subjects and for more mixed audiences than he had ever reached before — or, indeed, than he would reach again. It seems to have been the time when, using all the experience and contacts that he had gained in his association with The New Age, he made the most strenuous efforts to fulfil the ambition he had confided to H.L. Mencken while seeking a way

out of clerking in Glasgow:

May I ask if there is a greater opportunity in America for original work in the journals and reviews? Do you think my work would be accepted if I sent it to some of the American reviews? I am certainly going to make an attempt to dispense with my clerical work, for it is, from my point of view, a sheer waste of time if I can make a living by writing. If you would be so kind as to give me your candid opinion of the literary market in America — and especially what can be made by writing for the better journals — I should be much obliged.

(Letters, p.21-22)

This ideal of a literary life is the dominant motive behind the work of the twenties. But just as Muir's account of this period follows a strategy parallel to that employed in talking about the time with The New Age, so the development of his career in the later 1920s parallels that of 1919-1923. Although the scale of activity is greatly enlarged, the general pattern is the same: Muir can be seen to be exercised on finding forms through which to influence the reader, working with much enthusiasm and some stamina, but becoming slowly disillusioned with the form he has chosen until quite suddenly abandoning it. Within this framework he continues to try to reconcile the conflicting elements of his identity as a Scot, as a member of the working class and as a writer wanting to join the forces of a (revitalised) English literary centre. Released from the narrow audience expectations with which he had compromised through The New Age, he is able to modify the characteristics of the writing persona; but it proves to be a change of restriction, not an escape to freedom, and he is not able to dispense with the use of a persona entirely. Moreover, the conflicts the persona seeks to conceal become increasingly

apparent in the response Muir makes to his subjects, especially when he begins to identify and criticise literary modernism. As Muir tries to cope with the resurgence of these problems, the use of personae becomes a dominant topic of concern in his writing, to such an extent that in 1928 he virtually abandons periodical literary journalism to concentrate on the experiments he might make with personae in the apparently freer context of novel-writing.

III 2

Mellown's Bibliography, by listing all the 'Our Generation' and 'Causerie' articles under single numbers, gives the impression that his contributions to The New Age were less extensive than in fact they were;³ but no such misinterpretation could be made of the listings of the work of the 1920s as a whole. Although there are no records of his writing for the Glasgow Herald before he left for London, nor of the drama criticism he did for The Scotsman, and although some pieces are omitted (such as the review of Sacheverell Sitwell's All Summer in a Day, which he wrote for Vogue in 1926(Letters, p.57)), the most obvious characteristic of the period remains the proliferation of essays and reviews for literary periodicals, and the variety of publications which carried his work. Latitudes, like We Moderns, consists of essays collected from a magazine, in this case The Freeman; and most chapters of Transition were published independently before they appeared in a single volume. Even The Structure of the Novel,⁴ being an extension of the views he had developed in regularly reviewing contemporary fiction, is directly attributable to his work for the periodicals

3. For full publication details, see bibliographical appendix p.

4. The Structure of the Novel (1928).

inasmuch as reviewing had encouraged his interest in fiction but also restricted his opportunities to consider theoretically the problems he was tackling.

It seems to be tacitly assumed that by moving from London in August 1921 Muir cut himself off from the literary world that was centred there⁵ and this assumption fosters the reading of the 1920s as a period important only for his spiritual development. 'Our Generation', however, continued until September 1922, and shows, by its similarities to Eliot's 'Commentaries', that Muir continued to be typical in his response as an alien writer to that centre. Throughout the 1920s his decision to work through periodicals marks his continued complicity with the ethos and mores of that literary sector.

The boom in literary magazines in the 1920s was encouraged by the end of the war-time restrictions on publishing. Muir wrote for many of the new magazines of the period, such as The Criterion, The Calendar of Modern Letters (later Calendar Quarterly), The Scottish Chapbook and The Scottish Nation; and the purpose underlying this association on Muir's part can be inferred from a letter written to Van Wyck Brooks in December 1922:

The temper of your work, for the task you have, I take it, in hand — the bringing of America culturally to her senses — is, I think, absolutely right. Such criticism as yours is more living than any one can find in England, because you have an end for America, and work towards it: whereas in England the critic has no general end, under the impression, mistaken it seems to me, that nothing, for culture in general, remains in

5. For example, Butter writes that London was 'exciting but life was becoming too hectic... He needed a time of quiet to discover himself. Luckily the means to get it came at just the right time.' (M & P, p.75).

that country to be done. This state of things (I mean in my country) is due almost certainly to the fact that the English critics are a class who, beneath their reading and equipment, have the prejudice of the English man in the street that culture does not matter. The English critics cannot see culture for the books, or rather for the one book or one writer they are immediately concerned with, and while certainly they deal very competently sometimes with their immediate subject, this lack of a general conception is a bad fault in them — having something profoundly to do with English indomitable self-satisfaction. But at any rate I am far enough away from it here no longer to be acutely hurt by it. (Letters, p.26-7)

Although his assimilation to the London centre of this ethos is such that he writes of England as 'my country', the political awareness of the New Age period is still apparent: each of the new papers advocated its own programme for cultural regeneration, in England or America or Scotland, so meeting Muir's desire for a 'general conception', an ideologically committed scheme within which the criticism of individual works or topics would depend on criteria that were not arbitrary. Being 'away from it' may have eased the embarrassment of The New Age's failure, but it also seems to have helped make him especially responsive to the motives of the new magazines.

But while the notion that the role of the literary periodical is to bring a country 'culturally to her senses' (the phrase is Muir's, not Brooks's) is clearly an extension of the Arnoldian bias of 'Our Generation', it also points to the fact that, unlike The New Age, these magazines did not seek to change the concept of literary orthodoxy by altering the structure of the society in which that concept functioned. Rather, they sought to change the design of the icons that were

venerated by that orthodoxy. Through the influence of his contacts in London, Muir was employed by established papers, writing for The Athenaeum, for example, because Leonard Woolf was then literary editor; and his growing reputation in America led to work for the Evening Post and the New York Nation; but for all this apparent heterogeneity, Muir did not attempt to move outside the boundaries of the literary world to the kind of directly political writing he had done for The New Age. In this phase of his bid for a career in the terms of the literary centre, he had to suppress the political dimension of his convictions; and the strain of this concealment can be detected in the occasional breakdown in his literary personae and, towards the end of the decade, in the temporary abandonment of the strategy of using periodical publication.

The idea that Muir planned his career at this time with any enthusiasm or energy comes strangely in contrast to the dominating values of the autobiography. There Muir barely mentions his writing for papers other than The New Age and The Freeman, so giving the impression that when the American paper collapsed in March 1924 he and Willa were totally reliant on her work as a teacher:

In the spring I was suddenly informed that The Freeman was to be discontinued. Neill was in Austria on his mountain, and to tide us over until we found some other way of making a living Willa wrote to him, asking if she could help again in his school; he sent her a warm invitation to come. (Auto, p.222)

His account of the months on the Sonntagberg concentrates on the composition of Chorus of the Newly Dead as if it were his sole employment, and Muir mentions reviewing only when he talks of the return to England.⁶

6. 'Leonard Woolf, at that time the literary editor of The Nation and Athenaeum, gave me books to review every now and then.' (Auto, p.226)

If this were an accurate reflection of his priorities in these years, it would be surprising that he continued to write critically at all; and yet he wrote several reviews for The New Age and the Evening Post Literary Review during the months at the free school: and between 1922 and 1928 he published approximately two hundred and fifty separate articles and reviews.

Butter seems to have omitted references to the progress of his career from his selection of Muir's letters, and yet their significance is unambiguous. For example, in September 1924 he writes to Schiff of the suggestion that he might review for the Weekly Westminster:

this will be an opportunity I think for making an appearance in England. I shall take care to exploit it as well as I can.⁷

There is equally little suggestion that he was writing only for money when he considers his first pieces for the Nation and Athenaeum in the same letter:

They have sent me books weekly now for the last three weeks, and asked for a column notice. That is not much; I know exactly how little it is; but even a column like that, done regularly and conscientiously, should awaken a little respect. And it is only a beginning.

Moreover, although The Freeman had opened up a further audience in America, there can be no doubt as to the direction in which his ambitions were aimed: he tells Schiff,

I must write two reviews for The Nation and three for the American Saturday Review of Books, reviews which awaited me when I arrived here and which I am very glad to get, for if they are continued

7. E.M. - Schiff, 1.9.24, NLS Ms. 19671 ff 47-50 (47).

they will give me a certain amount of steady work and money. An acceptance from The New Republic of an article I wrote a long time ago also awaited me, with a request for more, so from one point of view I am very pleased. But I want particularly to be published and recognised in some form or other in England.⁸

Later he again emphasises the importance of prestige in England to him:

I think I could quite easily get the article accepted in America, but as I want primarily to get some kind of a hearing in England, I should like it to appear here first.⁹

Personal ambition seems to have outrun his awareness of the significance of the kind of work he was doing even at this comparatively late date: when Woolf told him that the TLS review of Chorus of the Newly Dead had sold over a hundred copies, he wrote to Schiff that he had never really believed that a review could have so great an effect.¹⁰ Yet although Willa reports that Woolf's com^mendation of his reviews gave Muir 'deep satisfaction' (Belonging, p.118), he did occasionally have moments of doubt about the wisdom of the policy he advocated in his articles. Of the essays designed for Transition he wrote:

The effect of the book will be to disgruntle most of the writers I deal with; as a stroke of policy it is the worst thing I could have done for contemporary literature, but that does not trouble me at present at all.¹¹

8. E.M. - Schiff, 2.8.24, NLS Ms 19671 ff 37-9 (37).

9. E.M. - Schiff, 16.9.24, NLS Ms 19671 ff 51-3 (51).

10. E.M. - Schiff, 12.8.26, NLS Ms 19671 ff 170-3 (171).

11. E.M. - Schiff, 8.2.26, NLS Ms 19671 ff 156-8 (157).

Clearly, the advancement of his career was of at least equal importance to him as the development of modern literature.

But for all his desire to belong to that literary world, either his interpretation of the way in which it operated or his awareness of the rules by which that operation could be discussed was slightly askew, as is shown by the minor dispute with T.S. Eliot over the nature of 'the Criterion group' towards the end of this period. Reviewing Sherard Vines's Movements in Modern English Poetry and Prose in The Nation and Athenaeum, he writes:

Mr Vines in his interesting volume is biased, as he was bound to be; he is in favour of the school of criticism which exalts Reason and is represented chiefly by The Monthly Criterion. (C37.4)

The next week Eliot's polite but firm response appears:

Sir, — Mr Edwin Muir, in his interesting review of Mr Sherard Vines's book in your issue of April 14th, speaks very amiably of what he calls 'the school of criticism which... is represented chiefly by The Monthly Criterion'. For this we should be grateful, but I should like to forestall a possible misconception. It would be unfortunate if a myth arose to the effect that 'the Criterion school of criticism' consisted of a compact body of theorists all holding one and the same theory. Someone would eventually demolish this myth, and the 'group' itself would be held responsible for its propagation. I see the danger of misunderstanding in the way in which Mr Muir joins the names of 'Mr Eliot, Mr Read, and Mr Richards'. I have great respect for the theories of the two latter: but it does not follow that I accept all of their theories, or that they accept all of mine or each other's. There are manifest divergences of which everyone is aware; and if we add the names of other Criterion contributors, including foreign writers such as Mr Fernandez and Mr Curtius, the scope of divergence will be still more patent. In short, The Criterion is not a 'school', but a meeting place for

writers, some of whom, certainly, have much in common; but what they have in common is not a theory or a dogma.

As for Mr Muir's other criticisms, I should be very glad if he would develop them at more length than is possible within the limits of a review of a book.¹²

That Muir had touched on a very tender nerve is shown by Eliot's repeating the argument in his editorial 'Commentary' a few weeks later:

What unites, we believe, the various writers both in England and in foreign countries who constitute what has been vaguely called 'the Criterion group', is not a common adhesion to a set of dogmatic principles, even of literary criticism, but a common interest in what we believe to be the most important matters of our time, which allows the widest variation in attitude and tendency. (VII 4, June 1928, p.4)

Muir had received The Criterion from its inception, even (through Schiff) while he was on the continent (Letters, p.38-9), and he was well aware of its dominant attitudes. The precise nature of the Criterion group is not at issue. Clearly, such a group existed, and arguably Muir, having reviewed Conrad Aitken's Bring! Bring! (C282) and had his own First Poems and Transition reviewed in the paper,¹³ held at least an associate membership which was untouched by this disagreement: he reviewed To Circumjack Cencrastus for Eliot in 1931 (C398). The interest of this exchange lies rather in the way it shows Muir, with his background of having Social Credit advocated quite openly in almost every article, still unable to achieve the degree of subtlety from which Eliot operated his ideological influence — however

12. 'The Monthly Criterion', Nation and Athenaeum, XLIII (21 April 1928), p.74.

13. The New Criterion, IV 1 (January 1926), p.205-7 and V 1 (January 1927), p.152-3.

well he was later to master the technique. This miscalculation shows him remaining somewhat on the fringes of the world he wanted to join, even after many years of assiduous apprenticeship and a considerable measure of success in its terms.

Butter points out that after The Freeman closed Muir did not confine his contributions to any single magazine (M & P, p.88). While this reflects the seriousness of his attempt to reach the widest possible audience and his reluctance to become financially dependent on any one paper, it also seems to suggest a certain fear of commitment.

This inability to escape from his peripheral situation led to an isolation that slowly increased his irritation and disillusionment with the form of his work, both as a reviewer and as an essayist. He begins to complain in his correspondence of the restrictions he felt: 'I have been hampered once more by lack of space' he writes,¹⁴ and later, discussing an essay on Schiff, he adds 'I could have entered into many other aspects of his work. Space alone prevented me from doing that'.¹⁵ He was expressing dissatisfaction as early as August 1924:

You may rely upon me when I say that I will do whatever I take in hand as well as I can, even if it is a half-column review. I have always done this, indeed; but I have often found that, in reviews especially, which have to be written at short notice and of a certain length, one can only give a caricature of one's raw impressions. With articles, too, which must be of a specified length, one is condemned to imperfection and can rarely get a subject in its completeness: in my opinion the 2000 word

14. EM - Schiff, 15.5.25, NLS Ms 19671, ff 121.

15. EM - Schiff, 21.8.25, NLS Ms 19671, ff 129-30 (129).

article which the weekly reviews, even the best, which are supposed to have a regard for literature, impose on us, is one of the most insidious and powerful enemies both of good criticism and literature that could have been invented by anyone who hated both. It makes criticism so difficult that hardly anyone attempts it, the other way being easier. For, only being allowed to insist on one aspect of a writer, or being compelled to set out the various aspects briefly and generally, one is forced to be either grotesquely one-sided and convey an unjust impression of one's author, or, in the alternative, say nothing about him at all except what everybody knows. The metier is grossly impossible, yet hundreds of us must follow it — one of the major injustices of literature today, it seems to me, standardised by all the reviews.¹⁶

He begins to despise the material he had to review, commenting variously:

No book I have had to review for the last three months has given me real pleasure, and the majority have been unspeakably stale and unprofitable;¹⁷

One's mind gets demoralised by reading always, as I have to, only the half-formed, the incomplete, the mediocre or the promising;¹⁸

and

I am tired of getting disappointed over false starts.¹⁹

This dissatisfaction spills over into the reviews and articles themselves, so that they comment on their own futility and become bitter in tone. For example, in 1926 he complains of a selection of new novels that

to criticize them would be absurd; the only thing that can fittingly be done with work of this kind is to advertise it. Those who read

16. EM - Schiff, 18.8.24, NLS Ms 19671, ff 42-6 (43).

17. EM - Schiff, 8.2.26, NLS Ms 19671, ff 156-8 (156).

18. EM - Schiff, 22.2.27, NLS Ms 19671, ff 185-7 (186).

19. EM - Schiff, 6.10.28, NLS Ms 19671, ff 201-3 (203).

Billy Padley's Wife will not be even vaguely interested to hear that it is good or bad; they will, however, want to know that it can be procured, that the plot is exciting without being shocking, or, if shocking, shocking in the right way, and that there is a happy ending. This is a class of information which should, and one hopes soon will, appear in the columns of the daily press. (C330)

The unspoken assumption that literary criticism has only to do with a certain class of literature and that all other written matter is simply a commercial product to be advertised highlights Muir's closeness to the concerns of the reviews, since the split in the reading public caused by the spread of bare literacy was one of the main topics of contemporary works. But the sense of personal failure, above or beyond the pressures of the literary system although not unrelated to it, comes more strongly in a piece written in 1928:

A regular essayist, weekly or daily, must husband his talent, must make every drop of it go as far as he can, so that there may always be some left over for a future of essay writing. But the more apt he becomes in the art of the periodical essay, the better he will learn how to do this, the less he will contrive to say, and the more his talent will approximate to a talent for saying next to nothing. Lacking matter, he will become all manner; and manner in itself, as everyone must have found some time or other, has the power of convincing us for a while... Yet an unchanging manner soon ceases to keep our attention; we may acquire a habit of tolerating it or of liking it, but we do not actually attend; and the professional essayist's aim is really to amuse us without interesting us. This can of course be done, for everybody wishes to be amused, and very few people wish to be interested. The real triumph of the regular essayist is thus a triumph of illusion; he convinces us that he is writing an essay when he is only pretending to do so. Obviously, a certain talent is needed for that, but it is not the

talent of Lamb or Mr Belloc; it is something else, rare, perhaps, but not on that account valuable. (C369)

The idea that the essayist is playing a deceptive game on his readers, working an 'illusion' within the terms of the literary world, in order to advance his own career (he 'must make every drop of it go as far as he can, so that there may always be some left over for a future of essay writing') seems, in the light of his earlier resolution to exploit every opportunity to the full, a particularly personal sneer. His scorn for his profession grew to the point where he could say, albeit sarcastically, of the responses in Priestley's essays Apes and Angels: A Book of Essays: they are such, no doubt, as an essayist should feel; they are not such as a human being would feel' (C 378). Such opinions make it unsurprising that he should write to Schiff in 1929: 'I have given up reviewing for the time being, to my great relief' (Letters, p.67). That relief and the return of that sneering tone (so reminiscent — in its short bitter sentences and its assumption of the rejection of all idealism — of the 'Causerie' articles) reflect too the outcome of Muir's experiments with personae in this period, experiments closely associated to his handling of his major theme, the development of modernist literature.

III 3

The fact that Muir's autobiography gives an unbalanced account of his work of the 1920s by mentioning only the New Age and Freeman articles obviously does not mean that these pieces were unimportant; but it can suggest that their importance might not lie exclusively in their relation to the financial exigencies Muir cites. His contributions to The Freeman, from 1920 to 1924, reveal the enthusiasm with which at the beginning of this decade Muir tackled the building of his career, the eagerness with which he intended to make the fullest use of the opportunities offered by a new paper with a new readership, and the ways in which he set about exploiting this opening by modifying his literary persona.

Muir's association with The Freeman resulted from H.L. Mencken's publishing We Moderns in the United States: Van Wyck Brooks, literary editor of the paper, reviewed it in terms of extravagant praise, claiming that

one thing is certain: no utterances more tonic, more bracing have rent the sultry firmament of contemporary literature. At a moment when mass fatalism was never more general, when determinism has become not only a conviction but a creed, when 'freedom' is demanded by all and universally misunderstood, such a book is a capital event. It is meat for the strong and music for the lovers of life. (The Freeman, 12 May 1920, p.214)

Clearly the book had made a deep impression, and it was one upon which Brooks acted quickly, since the first of Muir's contributions in his paper — a column of aphorisms and short paragraphs — was published

in December 1920.

Although in England We Moderns had been credited to 'Edward Moore', the American edition gave the name of the author as 'Edwin Muir'; and while all his New Age pieces were signed with the pseudonym until June 1922, 'Edward Moore' never appeared in The Freeman. The full functions of the persona which 'Edward Moore' signals were closely related to the circumstances of The New Age, from which the American magazine — working in a different social, political and cultural context — was exempt; but the underlying confusion of Brooks having hired Muir on the basis of what might be regarded as 'Moore's' writing reveals itself in three abortive attempts to start a series of articles in the manner of 'We Moderns' for readers of The Freeman: 'Reflections and Conjectures' (C81, C99), 'Aphorisms' (C129, C134, C137), and 'Meditations' (C146, C147). The significance of his using this style at this time is discernible when Muir reprints a paragraph from one of these articles (C129) in a later column of the 'Causerie de Jeudi' series (C142B): the writing that attempts to repeat the style of We Moderns in order to secure Brooks's confidence also serves to recall that style for the readers of The New Age. Since only one paragraph is involved, this repetition cannot be seen as part of a programme for testing American and English readers with the same material, but only — as the time lapse of five months also suggests — as a failure of invention, so confirming the impression that by this time the restrictions imposed by 'Moore's' technique were limiting his writing to the point where they outweighed the advantages it had once offered.

However, the exploitation of the freedom offered by the new, American audience involved much more than the delayed development

into a more sustained essay form.that occurred in his later Freeman articles. The contents list of Latitudes shows that in choosing the articles from The Freeman which he wished to carry forward his critical reputation, the three which he deliberately brought to the fore by giving them initial placing were all about specifically Scottish subjects: 'Robert Burns' (C153), 'Ballads' (C145) and 'George Douglas' (C150). A major characteristic of 'Edward Moore' was his denial of Muir's Scottishness, but here Muir seems to be positively emphasising his nationality and his national interests. Moreover, the general theme of these articles — and the specific subject of the first — is the nature of the relationships in Scotland between the peasantry, the writer who comes from the peasantry, and the social élite that constitutes the literary world and informs it with its own class expectations and prejudices. The essays seem designed, at one level, to investigate the pressures that had demanded that earlier concealment of important aspects of his own identity: and perhaps, at another level, to compensate for that denial.

Although A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle and Albyn show attacking the Burns cult to have been a standard practice of the Renaissance movement,²⁰ and although Muir was to adopt an approach largely

20. For example,

'No' wan in fifty kens a word Burns wrote
 But misapplied is a 'body's property,
 And gin there was his like alive the day
 They'd be the last a kennin' haund to gi'e.' (1.41-4),

and

'A great deal of Burns' work is eighteenth-century conversationalism of a deplorable kind. Most of his love-songs have a deadly sameness. The task of Scottish poetry today is to rise out of the rut in which it has so long been confined.' (Albyn, p.38).

congruent with this, in 'Burns and Holy Willie' (C 639) and his review of There was a Lad(C1009) for example, the reactions of later generations to Burns are not the central issue of this essay. It focusses rather on the social structure of eighteenth century Scotland; and Muir condemns that formation for having trapped the poet in an untenable position, the strains of which led to his self-destruction.

'It was after his visit to Edinburgh that his nature, strongly built and normal, disintegrated', writes Muir,²¹ immediately suggesting that Edinburgh was for Burns, as a peasant, an unnatural and debilitating place. 'His character gradually fell to pieces', he argues, because within the structure of that society to be a poet alienated him from the peasantry while being a peasant prevented him from entering fully the social world of the literary 'elite. In Edinburgh

the most dully respectable circle in literary history sat and watched Burns in his sober hours, driving him regularly to the extreme where good fellowship was not very strongly flavoured with decency. (p.3)

This crude division of all Burns's acquaintances into the categories of 'moralists or tipplers' (p.2), non-drinking intellectuals or non-intellectual drinkers, is obviously an oversimplification, and it seems particularly crude in this essay without the analysis of the Scottish 'dissociation of sensibility' which buttresses extensions of the same argument in Scott and Scotland. But its function here is to set up the picture of a divided society against which a particularly political reading of the poetry may be brought forward:

21. Latitudes, p.3.

In his songs he put himself in a certain attitude, or rather, a certain number of attitudes, and the voices which spoke through them were those of the entire Scots peasantry of his time... Even in his songs for men the voice was not often Burns'; it was generally that of the ideal young Scots peasant who is one of his chief creations. He himself became this Scots peasant, generalising himself in his race and ^{his} his class... So complete, so universal was he here that it may be said of him that he created the modern Scots peasant. He did not make the Scots peasantry any better morally, perhaps, but he gave them something which is more valuable than morality, an aesthetic consciousness of their joys and griefs, their nature and destiny, and left them with some added touch of humanity and of poise. (p.8)

This notion of the writer deliberately and actively 'putting himself' into a number of 'attitudes' through which the voices of his people and class or alliance of classes, and the further notion that the writer's own identity will modify itself in conformity with the concept behind those attitudes (Burns 'became this Scots peasant'), might appropriately be read as an account of Muir's own creation of personae in the face of a later literary world from which he, again as a member of the Scots peasantry, had also been excluded because of 'his race and his class'. Indeed, since the members of this literary circle that Muir attacks for its part in the destruction of Burns were also Scots, this 'racial' factor seems inappropriate: it was not Burns in Edinburgh but Muir in London who ran the risk of being excluded from the literary centre of the day because his nationality weighed against him. The personal implications break through the logic of the overt argument of the essay here, revealing a factor that had been important in later extensions of the same problem as Muir had experienced it, but which are strictly irrelevant to the period with which the article deals.

Further, the idea that Burns was writing on behalf of the peasantry, that his chief value was as an instrument in bringing that class to an aesthetic self-consciousness of its 'nature and destiny', reflects the remnant idealism of 'Our Generation' and suggests some dissatisfaction with his present role as a critic. Already Muir can be seen to be using criticism of Scottish topics as a way of writing about his personal difficulties, rewriting literary history in an attempt to produce an analysis that would explain the unadmitted anomalies in his own position as an adjunct to literary London. It is as if he were afraid of losing his position as Burns had done: 'some fairy', he says,

had set him for a little in the centre of a rich and foreign society; then, calmly and finally, she had taken it from under his feet. (p.3)

The use of the word 'foreign' in relation to Edinburgh society, while arguably apt in terms of Burns's feelings towards the dominant class and their cultural values, is not restricted to this level in the text, and seems more immediately relevant to Muir's situation in London. Since he was caught in the trap of being unable to discuss his doubts about his position openly for fear that such an admission would, by breaking the etiquette of the literary world's pretence to international, classless openness, jeopardise his hard-won acceptance at the centre, the rather coy and totally inappropriate figure of a transposing fairy reflects the uncertainty that infects his writing whenever he comes near to letting his audience see that he did not belong in any straightforward way to the sector and level of society which he purported to represent to them. The essay shows Muir achieving a

greater literary subtlety with which to exploit the more cosmopolitan interests of his American readers while liberating repressed areas of his identity for conscious consideration.

The poetic tradition which Muir opposes to that of literary Edinburgh here is the balladry of the peasants, and the discussion of this topic is continued in the second of the Latitudes essays, which shows that one of the results for Muir of being able to examine Scottish issues was an increased willingness to advocate virtues eccentric to the mainstream of English literary criticism. For example, the ballads are said to

go immediately to that point beyond which it is impossible to go, and touch the very bounds of passion and of life; they achieve great poetry by an unconditionality which rejects, where other literatures use, the image.(p.18)

Although such phrases as 'touch the very bounds of passion and of life' show that he has only the romantically impressionistic with which to oppose the contemporary belief in the image as the essential aspect of the poetic, he is at least trying to bring different criteria to bear.

Similarly, his reference to contemporary writers in the essay on 'George Douglas' is rather snide: The House with the Green Shutters is, he says,

in solidity, in form, above all in imaginative power... easily greater than anything that has been achieved since, either by the reputations (a little aging) of Mr Conrad and Mr Galsworthy, or by later writers such as Mr Lawrence and Mr Joyce whom no one can avoid the obsession of taking too seriously (p.32);

but he goes on to make the point that 'Douglas's' imagination is of

the same order as that of Emily Brontë, and that English criticism has quite failed to come to terms with either's work.

The prominence given to these essays in Latitudes reflects Muir's new confidence in his ability to handle material which might have alienated his audience; and since they appeared comparatively early in his association with The Freeman (in January and May 1923) it seems likely that they also indicate the frustration built up by the restrictions of The New Age. Other articles later in The Freeman could be said to attack the old 'Moore' persona further by being even more overtly personal: 'A Plea for Psychology in Literary Criticism' (C94), for example, or the reports sent back from his travels in Europe ('Impressions of a People' (C139); 'At Salzburg' (C183)). The most extreme case of this must be 'Edwin Muir and F.G. Scott — A Conversation' (C204), in the course of which Muir refers to their attitude to art being 'characteristically Scottish' and concludes, in a manner slightly reminiscent of Mitrinović's 'World Affairs', that aesthetic judgement is probably 'a question of race in the end'. Such pieces are not included in Latitudes: that which the American readers of The Freeman magazine might be expected to tolerate might not necessarily be acceptable in a book also published in London.

To some extent, however, Muir was able to turn his continuingly peripheral relationship to the London centre to advantage. In a benign cycle, The Freeman articles paid for his travels in Europe, in the course of which he learnt about European writers on whom he then wrote introductory articles for his American readers. With the debateable exception of 'George Douglas', none of these pieces was reprinted in Latitudes, suggesting that Muir himself recognised that

they were little more than simple sketches of each writer's scope and achievement; but he was helping to attack cultural chauvinism by encouraging an interest in foreign writers through these pieces, written with varying degrees of accuracy, on such writers as Hölderlin, Hamsun, Wedekind, Hoffmannsthal, Pirandello and Hauptmann. In tone these essays are rather bland, with Muir writing the dull English of the literary essayist,²² and it is important to recognise that for all the advances in escaping from 'Moore' he felt it necessary to maintain his position within the literary world by leavening his output with such conventionally written pieces, even at this most adventurous time. Nonetheless, this role of cultural interpreter was one Muir found congenial and it was one that he could play on several levels. Since he was writing for American readers, he began to produce similar articles on English writers: Sitwell, de la Mare, Huxley, Squire, Drinkwater, Lawrence and Davies, for example, are treated in reviews expanding into more general considerations.²³ Later in the decade, he was to write on Scottish developments for both American and English magazines;²⁴ but perhaps the most significant instance of this kind of

22. For example, he writes of Hoffman:

'this holding in the country of imagination was not so small as he himself said it was, and he lived on it with an intensity which one finds only in inspired artists' (C154);

and of Davies that

'not all that he has included in his Collected Poems will be remembered in fifty years time, but a fair proportion of it will, if only for the pleasure it will continue to communicate' (C217).

23. C175, C178, C186, C190, C195, C207 and C217 respectively.

24. See Chapter V.

activity is comprised of his attempts to deal, not with a single author, but with a particular international movement. He helped to identify the growth of modernism within the literary world, and he interpreted it to that world as breaking most of its barriers of class and culture. Perhaps because of The Freeman's general sympathy with the post-war revival of humanism in America, his first essay on this topic was entitled 'The Assault on Humanism' (C160);²⁵ and in it he laid the foundations of the attack on literary modernism that was to be his major and most significant work of the decade.

III 4

I have in my mind at present an essay on the assault in modern literature on the humanistic tradition: I mean the new savagery, shallow but powerful, in the works of such people as Kipling, Lawrence, O'Neill, the German Expressionists and so forth, which I shall try to appraise from the standpoint of its human validity, that is, from the standpoint of humanism. All this I should like to show not as the appearance of something new but as the disappearance, the defeat, of something immemorial: therefore a weakness, and a weakening of the grasp which the total humanity of the world has upon itself. (Letters, p.27-8)

Even in this first outlining of his ideas on modernism to Van Wyck Brooks in April 1923, Muir spends more time discussing the strategy of

25. The essay was first published in The Freeman, VII (27 June 1923), p.369-371 (C160). It was reprinted in The Scottish Nation, I (4 Sept 1923), p.6-7, and Grieve responded to it in the issue of 16 Oct p.4-5. Muir replied in 'The Assault on Humanism Again', The Scottish Nation, II (6 Nov 1923), p.4 (C196a), and there was a further follow-up when F.V. Brandford's letter was published on 10 November, p.10.

defence he will adopt than in identifying the enemy. He makes it clear that he is to take a stand on a principle of conservation: he intends to challenge that element in modern literature which he calls 'the new savagery' not on the grounds that it is something new, but specifically because it signals 'the disappearance, the defeat, of something immemorial'. The aim is to defend what he sees as one of the principles on which literary culture in its existing form depends; and although the published version of the essay shows a broadening in the definition of the danger, the defence against it is unaltered. The assault on humanism is said to be 'unconscious', and it is held to 'characterize our time':

It is a movement which is difficult not merely to define, but even to perceive; for it is indirect, unconscious, and to all appearances more human than the humanistic tradition itself. Its chief preconception, crude enough when one has disentangled it, is that culture and civilization are things which stand between mankind and itself; and its main concern, therefore, is with the immediate contacts of life, in which it hopes to find a life beyond that which is expressed in all the activities of man, immediate and general. It uses the notebook more than the inward eye, and the diary more than either. It distrusts theories, it distrusts consciousness; it distrusts everything, indeed, but the instinctive contact with the immediate environment. It eschews that casting of oneself out into the world, that vicarious assumption of all forms of life, which is imagination; it will understand its immediate environment, and it will understand nothing more. This, I am aware, is a violent description of the movement against the humanistic tradition; but the movement has, in fact, become violent, and the qualities I have attributed to it are, without exaggeration, those of writers such as Mr D.H. Lawrence, Mr Sherwood Anderson, more than one of the German Expressionists, and almost all of the members of the inarticulate school of poetry. (p.369-370)

The violent attack on the 'humanistic tradition' is described in the terms of a revolt by the senses and the instincts against culture and civilization, an assertion of the priority of immediate contact over the objectifying distance sought by the intellect; yet, almost paradoxically, Muir goes on to trace the origins of this movement in the political naturalism of Shaw and Wells:

While failing to rise to that vision of human life in all times and in all lands which is the possession of the artist, they had a real apprehension of man as a political entity; they had, in short, a sense of the drama of society. This, which made them Humanists on one side, deprived them ultimately of the final fruit of humanism; for they were compelled to distort the image of humanity a little, indeed more than a little, to fit it to the destiny they had fixed upon for humanity; and they saw mankind in the end, not through the timeless eyes of the imagination, but through the most advanced preconceptions of a particular twenty years... They vulgarised the human drama, and immensely interested the public in it. They roused the people's conscience and sent imagination and wonder to sleep... They raised a standard of what might be desired and done; but at the same time they violated light-heartedly the most sacred canons of art. With intellectual and moral consciences of shining lustre, they had an artistic conscience which might shock savages. Their good and their evil they bequeathed respectively to the Socialist movement and to Mr D.H. Lawrence. (p.370)

There is a confusion in this logic that arises from Muir's adoption of the notion that the intellect and the imagination are totally separable entities: an excess of the former in Shaw and Wells, it is argued, leads through an exaggerated interest in the particular to the repudiation of the latter by Lawrence. Muir is defending that article of centrist faith which holds that politics is a 'lower' activity than

art — a useful one, as Muir concedes ('They were men all the same to whom one cannot deny admiration; for to stir an impersonal conscience in a raw mass of humanity is a feat which can hardly be overpraised' p.370), but one demanding the reduction of their art from civilized standards to those of 'savages'. Intellect versus imagination, politics versus art: the old universalism and totalising impulse of 'Our Generation' have been left far behind. Having had to make extensive compromises with his own identity in order to win acceptance in this literary world, he is now prepared to produce almost any arguments in defence of its values. The pressure is such that his recognising the existence of the major developments in contemporary literature and his identifying of some of its characteristics cannot be freed from the restrictions of his cultural context; and the anomalies of that context are reflected by the flaws in the expression of his response.

A listing of such flaws would include the violence done to his earlier belief in a totalising approach to criticism, but it would also mark the difficulty Muir had in reconciling the different commitments of his position in the early 1920s. One instance of this awkwardness centres on his remarks on internationalism in The Scottish Nation. 'The Assault on Humanism' was reprinted in Grieve's paper in September 1923 (C177A), and Grieve uses it as the basis for his review of a selection of books including Lawrence's Kangaroo and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious the following month (C177A); in the course of his 'excessively rambling rejoinder' to Grieve's remarks ('The Assault on Humanism Again', C196A), Muir writes:

Recently I happened to come across an anthology of modern Swedish short stories, published in an American translation. I expected to find in them something which short stories written in London or Capri would not contain... But the younger writers without exception weighed me down with the accumulated banality of all the chief capitals of the literary world. Except for the northern names, and the fact that the snow fell more frequently, these stories might have been written in Paris, London, Berlin, New York, or even Prague. The writers did not seem to know the land they were born in. The fact is that the itch to be new, in all the latitudes of the earth, and to keep London in one's back parlour, has produced a very disconcerting result: it is impossible now to encounter anything really new in the writings of foreign peoples. I paint the general scene a little darker than it is in reality: for from nationality no one can ever absolutely escape, and the artist least of all. But what I wish to make clear is that inspiration is being more and more sought in generalised, unconsciously intellectual and secondary things, rather than in a given piece of life with which one is implicated (p.4).

Muir fails to define the terms of his quarrel with modernism sufficiently precisely at the outset, and their instability is apparent here. The notion that inspiration is being found in the 'unconsciously intellectual' seems a contradiction in terms and sits oddly in support of an original thesis that held 'the new savagery' to be a regression to the instinctive from the distanced rationality of 'culture and civilization'. Moreover, Lawrence's chief offence had been cited as a preoccupation with 'the immediate contacts of life', yet here Muir's complaint is that writers have lost contact with 'a given piece of life with which one is implicated'. Writing for The Scottish Nation has complicated his defence of the central tradition. His response to this tricky situation can be seen as the classic imperialist manoeuvre: he tries to turn two forces threatening to loosen the control of the centre

against each other. By claiming that the internationalism of modernism is a disguised version of centralism (they are said to attempt 'to keep London in one's back parlour'), he suggests that they are more of a threat to peripheral cultures than the usual workings of English hegemony.

This flexibility of persona, as Muir allows himself to be defined by opinions that are only partially congruent with the expectations of his audience, is clearly an extension of the practice employed with The New Age; but the increasing complexity of his positions must have demanded an even stronger commitment to the values of the centre as justification of his campaigns. Just as he had had to suppress some elements of his identity to join the centre on going to London, so he had now to fight against his natural inclination towards the modernists and his recognition that theirs is the best work of the period.

Transition expresses these conflicting pressures by its very existence. In a letter to Schiff Muir wrote:

I am really trying to put a new dose of intellectual honesty into these essays, testing myself quite rigorously as I go along.²⁶

But the very earnestness with which he phrases this aspiration suggests he knows that the degree of 'honesty' he might attain would be circumscribed by his own position, which prevented him from explicitly acknowledging that although the essays disapproved of the writers in question, the fact that they absorbed most of his interest and stimulated his best critical writing through the middle of the decade speaks of at least some essential attraction.

26. EM - Schiff, 1.1.25, NLS Ms 19671, ff 79-81 (81). Again, Butter omits this section from Letters, p.43-4.

Transition, as can be seen from the inclusion of Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey, goes far beyond the notion of a 'new savagery'; and indeed, although Muir never uses the word, the essays are working on different aspects of modernism. That he recognises that he is dealing with a significant phenomenon is shown by his justifying his exclusion of Wyndham Lewis on the grounds that he was not yet a mature writer and might prove not to belong to the movement at all:

Lewis seems to hold up each of his characters in turn to study them, and there is therefore no vitality of movement in the book, but only a concentrated intensity of isolated gesture. This makes the book unnatural to me, though there are flashes of greatness in it. But I feel I can hardly include Lewis in my book of criticisms; as a writer I feel he has not come to anything like his stature yet; he may become a very great writer; in fact I feel that if he becomes anything as a writer he will become that. But I must wait, so far as he is concerned.²⁷

The tension of finding himself ideologically opposed to the most important writers of the day must help explain the insistence throughout Transition on the situational nature of all thought. It is almost as if, in his essay on the Zeit Geist, Muir is trying to warn his readers that his opinions are not definitive and that the remarks of his Preface are not merely modest:

We are as much the children of the works of our age as they are of us; we are part of them, and yet we must pass judgement on them... We have reactions to them, and then opinions about them. These opinions transpire in conversation; they rarely are allowed the publicity of the printed word. A rash action may occasionally be useful; and it is in this belief that I have written these essays on figures whom a later age will judge or forget. (vii-viii)

27. EM - Schiff, 1.9.24, NLS Ms 19671, ff 47-50 (49).

Since the central problem Muir identifies with these writers is that he differs with their use of tradition, it is not surprising that the essay on T.S. Eliot should typify and most succinctly express the problem. Muir divides Eliot's work according to the service his criticism and his poetry do for that tradition. The former is not given unqualified praise, since Muir's estimation of the role of tradition is higher than that of his subject:

Why is it that... Mr Eliot always appears to us to underestimate the free character of tradition, the fact that in its living perpetuation it gives the artist his proper liberty, and is not so much a thing to be submitted to or imposed as to be discovered and welcomed? The influence of tradition on Mr Eliot's criticism is not to make it uniformly bold and comprehensive but more generally to make it cautious. (p.133-4)

However, Muir is unable to accept Eliot's pessimism about the state of European culture: his poetry, he writes, has perhaps had greater influence than his prose, but 'it has not been in the same direction as his influence as a critic':

Mr Eliot's poetry is in reality very narrow, and in spite of its great refinement of sensibility, very simple. In the main it is a statement of two opposed experiences: the experiences of beauty and ugliness, of art and reality, of literature and life... It is not false or shallow, but it is inconclusive: it lacks immediacy and importance. It expresses an attitude to life, not a principle of life... As a poet, Mr Eliot lacks seriousness. (p.137, 140-1)

Muir's commitment to the tradition of English literature is clearly so strong that he is convinced that Eliot's poetry not only laments the loss of that tradition but is an incitement to its destruction. Only by understanding that he had been brought to this intensity of feeling

by the anomalies of his own position does it become possible to explain such apparent mistakes as his final judgement of Eliot —

Although his symbolism makes Mr Eliot's poetry arresting, piquant, unique, it makes him fatal to imitators and till now a poet of inferior range. The instrument of expression he has forged would not serve for a great poet, and could not be used by an unskilful one (p.143-4).

— and to see the significance of Transition in his oeuvre as marking the continuing conflict of the differing aspects of his own identity with the social formations within which he wished to write.

III 5

In all his critical writing of this decade, Muir never drops the persona of the reviewer, of the educated member of the English literary scene whose interests were possibly more wide ranging than was usual in such men, but whose central role and position were unquestioned. Writing reviews and essays to meet a series of specific markets, he was able to modify this persona to suit the expectations of each separate audience — becoming the defender of peripheral nationalism in The Scottish Nation or the cosmopolitan traveller for readers of The Freeman, for example — so attaining a wider range of personae without disturbing the essential characteristics too severely.

But as the decade progressed, Muir found himself increasingly restricted by two related forces: the ideology created by his personal position in society and the responses he had made to that position

began to come into conflict with the ideologies of those with whom his natural allegiance might have been expected to lie (notably writers like Lawrence who shared something of his class background, and Eliot who was also not English), and for whom he did have a certain amount of sympathy. And, secondly, the limits of the periodical essay and review as forms through which significant work might be done also impressed themselves more deeply upon him, until he temporarily abandoned such writing altogether.

From this state of disillusionment and confusion, Muir does not retreat into silence, but in fact attempts one of the most radical experiments of his career. In the novels he now writes, Muir can be seen to be tackling the problems of his cultural role, and of his Scottish and working class background; to be re-examining his attitude to the techniques of modernism; and to be further exploring the use of personae in seeking a new formation that would resolve these issues.

Chapter IV :

The Novels, 1927 - 1932

1927	To Surrey	<u>The Marionette</u>
1928	December: ceased reviewing	<u>The Structure of the Novel</u>
1929	To Sussex	<u>John Knox</u>
1931		<u>The Three Brothers</u>
1932	To Hampstead	<u>Six Poems</u>
		<u>Poor Tom</u>

IV 1

While none of Muir's writings is indexed in his autobiography, the sole mention of the novels in the text seems to be a single reference in passing to the writing of The Three Brothers. Again, the technique applied in dealing with works which do not wholly conform to the later ideology is barely to note their existence, and immediately to undermine the little recognition they do receive with the suggestion that the poetry he was producing simultaneously is the more important and significant work.

Summing up the early thirties, Muir writes:

We were still making a tolerable income from translating. My wife had finished her novel, Imagined Corners, and I was working on a story of the Reformation, The Three Brothers. Our young son simplified life for us, and filled it with a daily sufficiency beyond which we did not have any wish to look. Yet the poetry I wrote at that time was tinged with apprehension. The fears of writers living nearer the centre of things must have communicated themselves to us. 1930 had passed, and the poetry of Wystan Auden and Stephen Spender and Cecil Day Lewis had caught the general feeling that something must be done if we were not to be entangled in a war. (Auto, p.231-2)

The tension between Muir's ambition to belong to the English literary centre and his religious transcendentalism must have been particularly taut at this time, as it became clear that that centre was being occupied by a set of poets claiming to write overtly political works from a committedly Communist position. Almost a decade later, and with that transcendentalism firmly established as the dominant element of his ideology, Muir still insists that his own poetry was related to the accepted English manifestations of the Zeitgeist, even if he qualifies that emphasis by stressing that he himself was not politically concerned but had only been infected by the anxieties of Auden, Spender and Lewis. The degree of peripheralness claimed is nicely calculated: his transcendentalism, his Scottishness, his age and his Labourite — Social Credit background separated him from that circle said to have been 'living nearer the centre of things'; yet his commitment to the English tradition attracted him to their work, and by 1940 is so strong that he prefers to align himself with them even at this secondary remove rather than to establish his own position.

Muir's unease with his fiction is revealed by his referring to Willa's 'novel' but calling his own book a 'story'. This terminology separates The Three Brothers from the class of narrative to which literary criticism is customarily applied, distancing it from his critical work. But the terminology has also a larger significance. Within the ideological structuring of the autobiography's narrative, instances of conventional anecdote function as the symbol and instrument of the peasant tradition of life in Orkney. From the first pages the telling of stories is identified as the means by which the chief example of the type of 'organic community' implicitly advocated in the book

perpetuates its imaginative structures. Muir introduces the notion of their importance gently, almost surreptitiously, by referring to the tales of immediately preceding generations. He writes:

My father's stories were drawn mostly from an earlier age, and I think they must have been handed on to him by his own father. They went back to the Napoleonic wars, the press-gang, and keelhauling.
(Auto, p.12)

But he goes on to stretch the time scale involved to hint at ancient ancestral — almost archetypal — memories:

The devil himself, as Auld Nick, sometimes came into these tales... My father had also a great number of stories about the Book of Black Arts... My father also knew the horseman's word. (Auto, p.13)

Naming The Three Brothers as a 'story', then, acts as a signal that even this unvalued sector of his work is to be grouped with the products of the intuitive-poetic-religious aspect of his life. This reinforces the notion that his writing was always seeking a return to the condition of the Orkney peasant and discourages investigation of the other, political concerns of the fiction. The Marionette and Poor Tom are not discussed in Muir's account; and again the critics have followed his lead, agreeing that the novels are minor and insignificant works.

Only Mellown's article, with the self-explanatory title 'Autobiographical Themes in the Novels of Edwin Muir'¹, considers the novels as a group in their own right — and it merely catalogues those incidents in the fiction which were revealed by the publication of The Story and the Fable to have been based on the author's personal experience. The habit of evaluating earlier works solely by their

1. Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, VI (1965), p.228-42.

correspondence to the autobiography is taken to its logical extreme in this essay. However, Butter goes beyond even this restriction: in Man and Poet he uses quotations from the novels to illustrate aspects of the biographical side of his study. For example, he gives David Blackadder's reaction to Edinburgh in The Three Brothers as an indication of Muir's first response to mainland Scotland (M&P, p.27), and he asserts, with a self-fulfilling logic, that particularly intensely-written incidents in the novels, such as Mansie's encounter with a horse in Poor Tom, must be autobiographical simply because they are interesting: he claims that 'Muir does not often write in his novels with such vividness except out of direct personal experience... so I think the incident must be from life' (M&P, p.21). Francis Hart is unusual in finding Willa's novels more interesting than her husband's;² but his belief that 'for Muir the novel provided only a temporary and restrictive alternative to poetry' (The Scottish Novel, p.349) shows that he too has adopted the orthodox line. Consequently, The Marionette is not considered, and the other two are attributed, contrary to Willa's opinion, to 'the "queer" part of himself that produced his poems' (Belonging p.151).

The same blend of neglect with unquestioning acceptance of Muir's later preference for his poetry has led to a lack of awareness of the novels as a stage in the development of his writing. Hart's notion

2. He describes Imagined Corners as 'the Middlemarch of a northern Scottish burgh'. The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey (1972): p.210.

that these books were some sort of diversion from the strain of his other writing might have been applicable had Muir tinkered recreationally with fiction throughout his career: but this is not the case. Although his early work as a reviewer had played upon his particular personal interest in psychoanalysis, and he had worked away from this subject as he made himself into a more specifically literary critic, the balance of his work had altered in the mid 1920s as he came to specialise by writing most frequently on contemporary novels. From 1925 to 1929 he wrote weekly columns on 'Fiction' for The Nation. The restrictions he felt in having to produce short regular surveys combined with his disagreements with Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction, Forster's Aspects of the Novel and Carruthers's Scheherezade to lead him to publish his own theoretical study, The Structure of the Novel, in 1928. This is a worthy but staid book, and its main achievement would seem to be that it led to his long stint of writing equally staid reviews of novels for The Listener to supplement his income in the 1930s and 1940s. Its production does, however, suggest that he approached the writing of his own novels with an unusually well-developed awareness of the theoretical problems of the form.

Moreover, Muir's fiction was the product not of occasional moments of leisure, but of a distinct period of time which he set aside, cutting off nearly all reviewing work and sacrificing the income it represented, for the writing of fiction. He wrote three novels in the six years from 1927 to 1932, and because they failed commercially and aesthetically he did not return to the form. His contemporary letters attack both the notion that he did not take this work

seriously and the concomitant implication that his critics should not do so either. Of The Marionette, for example, he told Schiff that he was 'toiling at it steadily, writing nearly every day';³ and although he sent it to Holms feeling that he had 'done well with this book',⁴ he entirely recast the second half in accordance with his friend's criticisms.⁵

Once it is agreed that the novels do claim some attention, it becomes possible that their uniquely keen significance in drawing together the major themes in the development of Muir's career may be recognized. Coming out of the critical engagement with his ambivalence to modernism and moving to tackle the problems of Scotland and Scottishness through a modification of the new techniques, they show him attempting to resolve the conflict between major elements of his identity, the literary figure of the London centre attempting to accommodate the Scottish socialist.

But there is a failure to find an adequate model for the role of the narrator in relation to 'his' characters, to find a formalisation of authority through 'independent' personae, which mars the structure of all three novels. This inability to handle the concept of authority can be seen as a reflection of the peculiar political status of Scotland. At least since the loss of the independence of the nation-state in 1707, all major decisions had been received from England, rendering the cultural notion of authority a problematic component in national structures of feeling. And this situation had contributed, in turn, to the absence of a large, self-conscious, self-confident Scottish middle-class, so denying Muir the kind of audience for which,

3. EM - Schiff, 15.9.26, NLS Ms 19671, ff. 174-5 (174).

4. EM - Schiff, 15.9.26, NLS Ms 19671 ff. 174-5 (174).

5. EM - Schiff, 10.12.26, NLS Ms 19671, f. 181.

with his training in reviewing for the English periodical market, he assumed the novel to be designed.

In 1919, Muir's failure to find a medium through which he might reach the audience that Grieve was to define shortly afterwards led to his departure for London; in the late 1920s, and partly as a result of that earlier move, he failed to find a form that might appeal to the readership that was to take up, almost simultaneously, Gibbon's Scots Quair. This collapse of what was intended to be the major development of his literary career contributed greatly to his confusion over Scottish nationalism and marks the beginning of his disillusionment with the Renaissance Movement. Within this context, his attempts to write fiction assume an important transitional and causal role in the development of Muir's ideological priorities.

IV 2

Muir's first evaluation of elements of modernism had been quite stern: of 'the assault on humanism' he declared that

interesting, talented and sincere as it is, it is an aberration which... if its life is unnaturally protracted will work nothing but harm. (C16C/C177)

The conclusion to Transition three years later shows him

modifying and ²molifying this judgement in recognition that these authors, alone among his contemporaries, were producing important writing:

for the literature of transition, unsatisfying as it is, has brought new possibilities of the mind to light, has made certain things conscious which before were unconscious; and no novelist will be able in future to write as if that literature had never existed. In that lies its abundant justification. (Transition, p.218)

That this appreciation of the values of modernism continued to increase through the decade and that it had a personal significance for Muir's own prose is shown by two remarks on the Sitwells. In Transition he had been very guarded in commending Edith Sitwell's work:

To see humanity in this way is to see it fanatically, without proportion, without that feeling of solidarity with which it distinguishes humanistic poetry. But it is at the same time to see it intensely and unconditionally, and outside all our ordinary ways of seeing. (Transition, p.159)

Yet his own view of The Marionette was that

the book is less a novel in the ordinary sense than a metaphysical, symbolical tragedy: and I fancy (if they think it has succeeded)

that it would appeal to the Sitwells: it is in another way in the same line .⁶

The reservation that his book is 'in another way' following the modernism of the Sitwells is important: while Muir is clearly trying to tackle one of the particular interests of modernism in attempting to portray an abnormally heightened type of consciousness, his technique stubbornly refuses to relax its conventionality. This is particularly damaging to the relationship between the narrator and the characters of the story: while Muir is willing to use them as centres of consciousness, the narrator is constantly pulling back, insisting that the characters cannot function independently but are merely for his manipulation according to the designs of his plot. The reader is always made aware that the narrator knows far more about this novel than any of the characters. For example there is an account of Hans's reaction when the broken puppet, Gretchen, is returned to him after being mended which unashamedly flaunts the narrator's omniscience:

She seemed to be Gretchen; yet she was not the Gretchen he knew. Her eyebrows sweeping in two smooth curves seemed bold and hard; her nose, her mouth, her chin, were cruelly palpable and final; her eyes were too close to him, and after a glance at them he turned his head aside. As if they were separate arcs and spheres woven into glass he saw the blue iris and small black pupil, open and still, like the works of a machine at rest; the cheeks exactly and too deliberately tinted; the mouth firm, physical and without mystery: and seeing these he could see nothing behind them; the Gretchen he had known was not there, in these physical lineaments. Remembering his former image of her, he felt ashamed; he wished to cover her face, too naked and too close to him.⁷

6. EM - Schiff, 10.11.26, NLS Ms 19671, ff. 176-80 (177).

7. The Marionette (1927). p.98-9.

'He felt ashamed' simply states Hans's feelings. The cool, expository tone of the passage follows the movement of the boy's attention, from the first rapid survey ('her nose, her mouth, her chin') to a slower examination of each feature; but the repetition of the fact that he felt she was 'too close' to him does little to convey the supposed complexities of Hans's thoughts or emotions. The passage falls between two stools: the description is clearly the narrator's, but since he is known only by his attempt to describe Hans, he fails to be sufficiently interesting to make the passage successful.

The general effect of granting supremacy to the authorial voice can be seen in the description of a moment when Hans wins a small victory in controlling his irrational fears. During an early walk through the town, he is particularly aware of the greatly increased number of people with whom he must come to terms:

Far away he saw the small figure of a man coming towards him on the immense, vacant strip of pavement, and this man, because he was alone, had a strange importance. Hans watched him approach with a more oppressive fear than he had felt among the crowds. The man seemed to take an endless time to reach them; but he moved aside as he neared and made way, not even looking. To Hans this seemed strange but pleasing, like something in a dream. He grew confident; the next man who appeared on this pavement would make way and pass him in the same manner. (p.39)

Again, the regularly structured and paced sentences emphasize that this is the narrator's account, since there is no attempt to suggest direct access to the boy's feelings for the reader. For instance, Muir tells us that 'the man seemed to take an endless time to reach them', but there is no fluctuation in the briskness of the writing; and the passage does

not attempt to convey the experience of Hans responding to his success in evading panic with a strengthening of confidence — his state is merely stated by the writer. Priority is consistently given to the business of getting on with the narrator's plot, to his mastery over the text rather than to Hans's control of his fears, even at the cost of making these fears and that plot seem insubstantial and uninteresting, a merely willed hypothetical construction.

This tension between the two levels of consciousness in The Marionette — the narrator's and the characters' — is also reflected in such disorientating details as the difficulty of knowing in which period the story is meant to be taking place. The constancy with which the incidents of the characters' daily lives are used simply as hooks from which to hang Muir's descriptions of the emotional and intellectual responses that are invoked directs attention away from occasional hints that the setting is not contemporary, such as mentioning horse-drawn 'lorries'⁸, lending the book an air of insubstantiality which is particularly noticeable in the opening chapters. Cumulatively, the death of the mother in childbirth, the total isolation of the family and above all the strict patriarchal authority of Martin over his son Hans and the servant Emma all suggest a late nineteenth century background; and since the book is largely an exercise of Muir's knowledge of Freudian and Jungian psychological theory, this would seem to be appropriate enough. But the technique used is such that the reader is always aware that Muir, as narrator, is uncomfortable because he has read their books while Martin, Hans and Emma have not. The problem is compounded by the fact that Muir's own experience had been of traumatic neurosis, which had responded to a psychoanalytic method to which Hans is denied access. He makes

8. The Marionette, p.37.

the boy congenitally retarded, so that the reader not only has the feeling that the narrator knows some answer to the situation of the book which he will not bring forward, but also that his knowledge is not precisely appropriate to the scenario which he creates. There is consequently a radical discrepancy between the plot of the novel and the subject Muir seems really to want to talk about.

Although the commitment to examining unusual forms of consciousness in this book can be seen as a reflection of modernist developments, the style of the writing cannot. For example, the descriptions of Hans's journies through Salzburg attempt to suggest the confusion of his perceptions as if from the boy's point of view:

He could not distinguish clearly the separate forms; everybody seemed to have a white face and to be dressed in black. A carter on a lorry, in his trousers and shirt, his hairy arms bare and with a heavy moustache on a grimy face, seemed like an evil figure come out of his dreams. (p.38)

Again, it is clearly the narrator who is speaking at all times, since Hans could not have articulated his consciousness in such orthodox sentences. Throughout the novel, the reluctance of the narrator to experiment by letting the characters talk for themselves, in relaxing his authority over the book, creates a vast imbalance in his favour with which nothing is achieved.

If Muir flirts with modernist ideas of psychology in The Marionette, he still does not commit himself to any serious experimentation beyond the personal risk of attempting fiction for the first time. It is as if he were afraid that he would be unable to resist the anti-humanist impulse which he had originally identified in that movement. Hart's decision to omit this novel from his study makes the point that The Three Brothers and Poor Tom are Scottish in subject matter as well as in authorship; and since these show

Muir to be willing at least to attempt to break with his conventional style of prose writing, it does seem that he regarded the concern with Scottish problems — inextricably involved with his early socialism for Muir — as somehow guaranteeing the humanist viewpoint he wished to defend. Unfortunately the nature of the society in which he hoped he might solve his problems with modernism raised other difficulties which prevented this potentially useful approach of these two sides of his identity from coming to any full or lasting solution.

That Muir began writing novels from within the acceptance of an Anglo-centric view of the form is shown by The Structure of the Novel. So secure is that understanding that he does not regard the principles of the relationships between society and individuals, novels and their audience, as open to debate: 'the only thing which can tell us about the novel', he argues, 'is the novel',⁹ and he confines himself to examining the distinctions between 'novels of action' and 'novels of character' (Chapter I), defined as those which develop through time, and those which rely on spatial distance (Chapter III). Although the book is a theoretical study, he uses the first person throughout, and this reliance on a major aspect of the technique of 'Edward Moore' — most noticeable when he presumes to claim on the reader's behalf that 'we agreed earlier' to assent to his opinions (p.134) — signals the continuation of the propagandist drive still associated with Anglo-centric arguments in Muir. His consequent failure to tackle the problems of writing novels for and about a social formation for which the English pattern of relationships is not paradigmatic helps explain the failure of his Scottish novels.

Hart argues that The Three Brothers is 'a theological novel of

9. The Structure of the Novel. p.12.

personal crisis, after the manner of J.H. Shorthouse or Pater's Marius, in which the hero's maturing centres painfully on a collision of faiths and allegiances dramatised at a historic moment' (The Scottish Novel, p.210). The conventional image of Muir always having been predominantly concerned with mystical subjects unduly restricts Hart's interpretation of the work, so that he fails to see it as Muir's first attempt to dramatise the thesis advanced at the end of his commissioned biography of John Knox:

What Knox really did was to rob Scotland of all the benefits of the Renaissance. Scotland never enjoyed these as England did, and no doubt the lack of that immense advantage has had a permanent effect. It can be felt, I imagine, even at the present day.¹⁰

The Three Brothers greatly extends this tentative suggestion: Scottish civilization is identified with Scottish Catholicism, and the Reformation is cast as the destructive enemy of both. While David Blackadder's experiences of religious conversion may well represent aspects of Muir's own past, the novel is designed so that each member of the family represents one of the variations of the Christian faith possible in the transitionary period of sixteenth century Scotland, from the mother's Catholicism through Sandy's Calvinism and David's Anabaptism to the father's atheistic humanism. The fragmentation of the old faith is made responsible for the break up of the family and, by extension, of Scottish society: the mother dies without the comfort of two of her sons for example, because they are fighting in religious wars in the west. The second half of the book deals with the brothers'

10. John Knox: Portrait of a Calvinist (1929), p.309.

11. The Three Brothers (1931).

experiences in Edinburgh and is hopelessly melodramatic, because the political emasculation of 'civil society'¹² means there is no settled order in which the hero might seek and find a place. For example, not only is David's lover faithless, there is no attempt to pursue her murderer, because lawlessness is the condition of so broken a society; and the book ends not with David's vision of reconciliation (p.334) but with his leaving Scotland altogether. This fragmented condition is implied to have continued to present-day Scotland by the narrator describing the thoughts and feelings of Scots-speaking characters in standard modern English: again the narrator is afraid to let the characters think for themselves, even if they do speak with some autonomy.

A novel set in modern Scotland had been a favoured project of Muir's

12. The phrase is applied in Tom Nairn's major analysis of Scottish politics: 'the standard European (later world) pattern,' he argues, was

of one political state and its society, or one distinguishable ethnic society and its own State. A world where the civil societies and the States mainly fitted each other, as it were, through the normal developmental struggles of last century and this. By comparison, Scotland was a hippogriff: a manifest bastard, in the world of nationalist wedlock... Scottish society apart from the State, 'civil society', was guaranteed in its independent existence by the Union. The church, the law, the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie of the Royal Burghs: all these institutions and the dominant social classes linked to them were confirmed in what they had demanded of separate identity. So was the distinct social culture they represented.

The Scots pattern so strikingly counterposed to the usual models is therefore that of a distinct civil society not married to 'its' state. It is one of heterogeneity, not that relative homogeneity which became the standard of nationalist development. A foreign, much stronger State and political system is as imposed on Scotland by the Union.

'Old and New Scottish Nationalism', The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism (1977), p.135-6.

since at least 1924.¹³ Poor Tom attempts to chart the varieties of political faith as The Three Brothers had dealt with religion. Its ending is similarly pessimistic: the Manson family is destroyed as the Blackadders had been, with Tom's death, his mother's obviously terminal illness and the abandonment of the relationship between Helen and Mansie as she continues her destructive progress with Bob Ryrie. Muir's attempt to redeem the bleakness by giving Mansie a vision of being enclosed in 'fold on fold' of life¹⁴ is no more convincing than his earlier security in the vision of the Socialist march. Yet Poor Tom remains Muir's most interesting novel because it is here that he takes the biggest technical risks of all his prose, relaxing his authority as narrator in an attempt to represent Mansie's own 'stream of consciousness'. Having hailed Annals of the Five Senses for trying, like Joyce's novels, 'to follow the subtle windings of the intellect for their own sake' (C200), Muir was well aware of the significance of adopting this style as a gesture towards modernism. The early experimental passages are extensions of the movement between the consciousnesses

13. He writes in some detail:

Then there is the novel I mentioned; whether it will be a success is still a mystery to me. The idea is not so bad, but it requires more skill than I've been able to acquire yet. I am going to call it Saturday; and my subject is, in fact, that day, which in an industrial place like Glasgow, and to the bulk of the people in the British Isles, has an atmosphere quite different from that of every other day. I am going to try and render this atmosphere, suggesting as a background the other working days in the week. The feeling of pathetic freedom which workmen have on the day when they stop work at 12 instead of 6 I know well, for I have felt it myself. There will be a central figure: and in him will be worked out the gradual disintegration of the day as it is consumed: the hope of the morning, the freshness of the afternoon after work, and then the gradual loosening and demoralisation of the evening, the slipping of happiness through one's fingers. To finish it, I shall have a chapter, being the reflection and judgement of the chief figure on the day, an extract from his diary. The story should be about 50,000 words, quite short, and I have half of it already written in rough draft, but I know it will have to be written again and differently. The idea is good, and sooner or later I hope to cope with it.

(Letters, p.36-7) Only the use of the diary survived from this projection.

14. Poor Tom (1932), p.254.

of character and narrator practised in The Marionette and The Three Brothers, as, for example, when he explains Mansie's attitude to English:

He disapproved of the travellers who put on a la-di-da Kelvinside accent; that was going too far altogether; and although he tried to speak correctly, in what he took to be English, he kept something plain and unassuming in the intonation: for it would have seemed to him offensive presumption to pretend to be anything but an ordinary fellow like anybody else. And besides it was only decent to the English language to pronounce it as it was spelt.
(p.34)

The movement from the narrator's comment (Mansie spoke 'in what he took to be English') to Mansie's own thoughts concerning the relationship between spelling and pronunciation works through the use of the phrase 'an ordinary fellow like anybody else': it occupies the middle of the passage and the middle ground between narrator and Mansie. Towards the end of the book Muir's confidence increases and he attempts more sustained representation of a character's thought, as, for example, when he tries to capture the jokiness with which Mansie deflects frightening memories of Gulliver's Travels:

There rose in Mansie's mind, a little obscenely, a picture of those powerful wrinkled haunches and that long, austere and somewhat stupid skull, so hard that it seemed to be made of granite rather than bone. If that were set on a throne of justice, by gum you would have to sit up! Not much friendliness about justice of that kind. Made a fellow shiver when he thought of it. Seemed to take all the stuffing out of a fellow.
(p.174-5)

Again, the narrator leads into Mansie's thought without conventionally signalling the change in viewpoint, but 'by gum' and the slight

disruption of syntax in the abbreviated beginnings of Mansie's sentences ('Not much friendliness...', 'Made a fellow shiver...' 'Seemed to take all the stuffing...') exhibits the tentativeness of Muir's approach: these may be Mansie's thoughts in Mansie's words, but the narrator is still discernible, writing them down.

Quietly signalling his awareness of Poor Tom's being part of a tradition of Scottish literature, it is in considering Burns's position in Scottish culture that Muir lets the technique run most freely, but without extending the technique or its effect:

He came to an open space. Tall shapes rose round him in the fog. George Square. High up, the electric lamps flung down cones of bluish light on the stony heads and shoulders of the smoke-grimed statues. It was dashed uncanny, all these figures standing there without moving. Standing there for ever so long, some of them for a hundred years maybe. Must seem a queer world to them if they were to waken up now; frighten them out of their wits, think they were in the next world. That tall one was Burns, couldn't even see his head. No electric light in his time, maybe no fog either. The banks o' Doon. I'll steal awa' to Nannie. And then this. The world was a terrible place, when you came to think of it. Burns had some dashed bad hours in his lifetime. All these women he got in the family way. But none so bad as he would have if he were to waken up here now. Like johnnies frozen stiff and cold; the last fellows left on ^{the} earth might look like this. Would the earth be covered with fog then? Scooting through space, dead, the whole dashed lot of them, frozen stiff in the fog. Nobody left to care a hang for the poor beggars. (p.245)

Yet perhaps the most disappointing aspect of Poor Tom is the fact of its being Muir's third novel. Attempting to reconcile his interest in modernism with his Scottishness, he had had to work through The Marionette and The Three Brothers before he could reach even this

mediocre level of stylistic experimentation. He had planned to make Poor Tom the starting point of a full examination of working-class life in Glasgow: as he wrote to his sister in 1932,

I look upon it only as the first third of a whole, the second of which I look upon as noisily comic — if I can bring it off.

(Letters, p.78)

But while the novels themselves seemed to be growing more adventurous, albeit very slowly, the cultural situation in which they were being produced was not. Muir's novels did not sell. He had been aware of the danger of this, writing of Poor Tom that

in England Leonard Woolf will have to have it, after publishing my other things. I hope that this will not prejudice its sales;¹⁶

and although the book was actually published by Dent, and no records remain of the actual sales figures of any of the novels, William Johnstone's recollection that 'the book was a failure, only some eighty copies being sold' (Letters, p.77) is probably accurate enough.

Unlike Gibbon, Muir was unable to create a technique which would give life to the notion of a Scottish community independent of the will of the narrator. Although he was beginning to let go of individual characters such as Mansie, his centralist training in expecting authority to reside outside the characters, paralleling the lack of authority within Scotland, is reflected in the predominance of an English-speaking narrator: there is nothing to match the voices of Kinraddie in these books.

16. EM - Schiff, 10.12.26, NLS Ms 19671, f 181.

But the very attempt to tackle the conflict of the elements of modernism and Scottishness in his ideology itself conflicted with the cultural situation in which he wrote, as embodied in the operations of the literary market. If the authoritarianism derived from his allegiance to the English literary centre prevented his novels from appealing to the Scottish readers who were to take up Sunset Song, his urge to examine Scottish issues simultaneously cut him off from English and American audiences. One reviewer of The Three Brothers noted of the characters that

apart from such peculiarities of conflict and behavior as the religions of that time impose upon them, all five might just as well have been inhabitants of twentieth-century Edinburgh; and I cannot help thinking that they would all have been better off there;¹⁷

and another complained that the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century were simply unable to take his interest, although he conceded that 'to a Scot... they may be of the greatest importance': he advised Muir to 'say goodbye to all that and discuss twentieth century Scotland, not ancient woes'.¹⁸ Since Poor Tom was no more successful than the others had been, Muir was only able to follow his impulse to analyse the Scottish situation by abandoning the novel form altogether and attempting a more obviously political discussion in his later works of the 1930s.

17. George Dangerfield, The Bookman (New York), LXXIV (January - February 1932), p.534.

18. H.C. Harwood, Saturday Review of Literature, CLI (7 March 1931), p.347.

Chapter V :

Scotland, 1923 - 1943

1929	To Sussex	<u>John Knox</u>
1931		<u>The Three Brothers</u>
1932	To Hampstead	<u>Six Poems</u>
		<u>Poor Tom</u>
1933	January: recommences reviewing	
1934	Travels through Scotland	<u>Variations on a Time Theme</u>
1935	August: to St Andrews	<u>Scottish Journey</u>
		<u>Social Credit and the Labour</u> <u>Party</u>
1936	Begins B.B.C. broadcasts	<u>Scott and Scotland</u>
1937		<u>Journeys and Places</u>

V 1

The aesthetic and commercial failure of Muir's novels precipitated two developments in his career: the first was that he was forced to return to the writing of reviews and periodical essays in order to earn money, and the second that the subject of those articles was more and more frequently a Scottish work or topic. In the early and mid 1930s, the main strength of his writing was channelled into an examination of the condition of Scotland, to help his understanding of the Scottish element in his own identity. But this exploration of the country and the culture which had rejected the proffered interpretations of The Three Brothers and Poor Tom was conditioned in part by that very rejection, and its influence, combined with the centralism ingested from Social Credit theory, led him to the conclusions of Scottish Journey, Social Credit and the Labour Party and Scott and Scotland which deny the viability of a separate Scottish state and culture as envisaged by the protagonists of the Scottish Renaissance Movement.

The skill with which Muir by this time operates the device of a literary persona as an instrument of ideological propaganda — the technique he had developed when working on The New Age in the service of Douglasism — is such that these books appear to be the honest reflections of the author finally rejecting the idea(1) of an independent Scotland; and the extent of skill that was employed to create this impression, though the integration of the persona with the ethos of the text, becomes apparent when the development of Muir's ideology in the 1930s is examined. His writings from this period reflect the

changes in position induced by these last attempts to reconcile the conflicting allegiances Muir held before he renounced that effort and turned to transcendental Christianity; and as his most polished writing up to that point, and his most desperate essays in resolution, they reveal the nature of those allegiances and the character of those attempts more clearly than any other work.

Unfortunately, his critics have only seen these writings as problematical. Grieve's vendetta against Scott and Scotland¹ made it impossible for them to disregard the book in the manner in which they virtually ignore Muir's journalism and his novels; but because they had accepted the persona of the autobiography as the 'true' Muir, his undeniably political concerns in his treatment of Scottish affairs could not be accommodated to the vision of the mystical, apolitical man they expected to see. The result has been a general reliance on Willa's suspicion that the bitterness of Scott and Scotland at least² derived entirely from his resentment at the social neglect of the English Literature department of St Andrews University (Belonging, p. 194), supplemented by George Bruce's assurances that Muir somehow did not realise the ideological implications of his own work at all.³ Serious criticism of Muir's work cannot depend on the inverted snobbery of the poet's wife, nor on the supposition by his friends that some of his

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1. For example, in the introduction to The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry (1940) and in most issues of The Voice of Scotland, which ran from June 1938 to August 1939.
 2. Scottish Journey (1934), not being a cause célèbre, could be more easily disregarded - and is largely ignored.
 3. '1936 - The Borderer and the Orcadian', The Age of MacDiarmid, p. 100-121 (101).

most powerful writing was not under his conscious control. Rather, it requires an understanding of his ideological development (and its concomitant stylistic consequences) which recognises Muir's particular sensitivity to a series of national pressures. For this reason it is important to see his work of the 1930s as the logical outcome of a progression from 1919, and not to denounce it as a regression from 1940.

In their attempts not to explain but to explain away these writings the critics are, as usual, following the suggestions concerning the relative importance of his works made by Muir himself in his autobiography. As the narrative approaches 1939, Muir enhances the dramatic effect of the religious 'conversion', which he wishes to be seen as the climax of the story and the centre of its meaning, by the intensification of an already familiar technique: while his statements about his association with The New Age had been of dubious validity, and Orage had been pictured as an unreliable crank, here he goes further in virtually wiping out most of his work of the decade and scorning the people with [^]wom he had shared earlier convictions. His account of the family's financial difficulties, for example, suggests that the only sources of income were those he chooses to list:

The war came at last, and our income from German translations stopped. I was writing a novel review for The Listener every fortnight; I had begun when Janet Adam Smith was literary editor, and when Joe Ackerley followed her he kindly asked me to continue. I was doing a weekly review for The Scotsman and occasional work for the Scottish B.B.C.; but all this did not bring in enough to keep the house going. My wife and I applied for teaching posts.

(Auto, p.247)

There is simply no hint of his other periodical articles, nor of the

books of the period. John Knox, the first study specifically of Scottish interest, and the first to include his criticisms of modern Scottish culture, is accorded a short paragraph: having been published in 1929, it was perhaps regarded as being sufficiently distanced from his other work on Scotland to be discounted as a personal reaction and discussed without implying too great an interest in the country itself. He writes:

Biographies were popular at the time, and I was commissioned by a publisher to write a biography of John Knox. He was not a man I admired, but I had felt for a long time that he had had an influence on Scottish life which was still active. As I read about him in the British Museum I came to dislike him more and more, and understood why every Scottish writer since the beginning of the eighteenth century had detested him: Hume, Boswell, Burns, Scott, ^{Hogg} Stevenson; everyone except Carlyle, who like Knox admired power. My book was not a good one; it was too full of dislike for Knox and certain things in Scottish life. Though dead for three centuries and a half, he was still too close for me to see him clearly, for I had met him, or someone very like him, over and over, it seemed to me, in the course of my life. The most surprising response to the book came from a Scottish minister. He told me he had never realised how badly the great reformer had behaved; it was clear to him that Knox was no gentleman. (Auto, p.231)

This account begins by suggesting that the book was a commercial sop to literary fashion: he stresses that it was written not out of any great interest or feeling of compulsion on the part of the author, but solely in reply to a publisher's commission. He concedes that he was interested in Knox's influence on modern Scotland ('he had had an influence on Scottish life which was still active'), but this is soon transmuted into the reason for the failure of the work: 'My book was

not a good one: it was too full of dislike for Knox and certain things in Scottish life'. His transcendentalist view of time is superimposed on the discussion, when he claims of Knox, 'I had met him, or someone very like him, over and over, it seemed to me, in the course of my life', so using the book as an occasion for further propagandising the later ideology which had played only a minor part in shaping the study itself; and the slightly mocking tone in which he relates the superficial response of a minister implies that the work that elicited such old-fashioned comment is unworthy of further consideration. But at least this volume is dealt with in the autobiography: the others are excluded altogether.

The determination with which this suppression is enforced is highlighted by the realisation that in his eagerness to avoid arousing the reader's interest in these works, Muir goes so far as to give a false impression of the events of the family's life. The most worrying example of this is in his omission not only of any mention of Scottish Journey, but even of the tour which he made as the subject of the book. Writing of the decision to leave England, he says:

Gavin was in hospital for two weeks; then we brought him home with his leg in plaster, and he lay for a few weeks longer on the sofa in the sitting-room and in good weather on a swing-settee which we had set up in the garden. But when he was able to walk again he twitched and trembled whenever a car passed, and we saw that we should have to leave Hampstead for a quieter place. A friend got a furnished house for us in St Andrews. But first we went to Orkney, so that our son should have^a complete rest... The peace helped to still Gavin's fears. After a month we moved south to St Andrews. (Auto, p.241-2)

The reader of this account would have no reason to suspect that the holiday on Orkney was possible only because the payment for Scottish Journey met the expense, nor to understand that Willa and Gavin went to Orkney some time ahead of Muir, staying there while he travelled around mainland Scotland collecting the observations on which the book was to be based (Belonging, p.174). Social Credit and the Labour Party and Scott and Scotland, however, are completely ignored.

As for Muir's associates, Grieve is completely absent from the record of the 1930s, as from the account of Montrose in the 1920s. The portrayal of those people whom he does mention is determined by the subsequent rejection of the values he had shared with them: his version of affairs concedes an interest in world politics, but only as a preliminary to scorning that interest and making it seem a vain, temporary aberration^r from his true concerns. He does this most blatantly when discussing the attitudes taken in St Andrews towards the Spanish Civil War:

The emergency brought a number of people together, Liberals, Socialists and churchgoers, and ourselves among them, and created a centre in the self-contained, averted little town. Without knowing very much about the situation, we were on the side of the Republicans; George Orwell had not made his first-hand report on it yet. We were, of course, right to be against Franco, but wrong to take the other side so self-righteously. Everyone who serves a political movement must be appalled later by the confident blindness of his choice.

The internal political pressure was also increasing. The campaign for a popular front to include Liberals, Socialists and Communists was warming up, and after a few discussions with odd acquaintances we became perfectly convinced that it was the policy to be supported. Soon afterwards the town was split in

two over the policy of Neville Chamberlain. People who had been fast friends passed each other in the street without speaking. (Auto, p.243)

The values implicitly put forward in this passage are heavily weighted against the notion of political concern and activity. The confusion of categorisation in listing 'Liberals, Socialists and churchgoers' together suggests that the political discrimination of these people was itself equally woolly; and by describing St Andrews as a 'self-contained, averted little town' he hints that any concern of its inhabitants with international politics was self-aggrandising, self-indulgent posturing. Claiming that their support of Republicanism was based on little information again undercuts their principles, as does the attribution of their assent to the notion of a popular front to a few discussions with odd acquaintances. The image of these people playing with political ideas, vaunting their social consciences to impress other parochial citizens, is unpleasant in the extreme. The distaste it induces is intensified by the observation that disputes over Spain could destroy old friendships — an observation so placed as to convey Muir's distrust of political principle. He seeks to distinguish the notion of friendship as somehow existing on a higher plane than political conviction, and deserving of its sacrifice. The bland assertion that 'everyone who serves a political movement must be appalled later by the confident blindness of his choice' makes it clear that this account is written from a point of view quite other than that Muir had held in the early and mid 1930s.

The later ideology can also be seen to be determining Muir's version of his own activity at that time. Having complained of St Andrews 'we could find no one to talk to' (Auto, p.243), Muir then refers to the

friendship of Drury and Oscar Oeser:

With them, we decided to start a small, informal club to discuss the questions of the day. The members met on Sunday evenings at one another's houses; the Oesers and ourselves, a congregational minister, two teachers from St. Leonard's Girls' School, two trade unionists, a local dustman, and some others. Like all who discuss political things, we assumed that we knew more about them than we actually did, and consequently came to no decision or to inadequate ones. The friendship which sprang up among us was the chief good produced by our meetings. (Auto, p.244)

By listing the members of the group according to the social status they would be accorded in St Andrews, Muir seems to be ridiculing his own views on self-conscious displays of enlightened opinion in mixing with such people as a local dustman. Again, he generalises unjustifiedly broadly in claiming that all attempts at political discussion are as inconclusive as he says these meetings were; and again, he elevates the notion of personal friendship above political awareness as the 'chief good' of the gatherings. It is, of course, impossible now to judge the depth of international political concern in St Andrews in the 1930s; and to this study such an examination would be irrelevant: what matters is the role of Muir's account of the period in deflecting attention from his own political and cultural concerns and writings.

This role is strengthened when he goes on to emphasise the importance of other areas of development. In earlier chapters of the autobiography the strategy is to make most of the poetic compositions of each period at the expense of the prose, but since he wrote little poetry at this time and since the religious element is about to become obviously central, he is now more explicit:

Though I took part in political discussions, I was really concerned during these years with something quite different. I had been happy in London; I was more unhappy in St Andrews than I had been since the time of my obscure fears and the course of psycho-analysis that dispelled them. I had come to a point from which, looking back, I was profoundly dissatisfied with myself. The turning of German books, good and bad, into English, had become meaningless as a way of life, and more and more difficult to support because of its meaninglessness. I began to keep a diary as a sort of judgement on myself. (Auto, p.244)

The description of translating from German as 'a way of life' implies that this was his only literary work of the period. Again, the suggestion is that his writing was merely a means of earning a living, involving no more than the most superficial level of consciousness, while his true development was 'really' proceeding, secretly but inexorably, on the spiritual plane. The keeping of a diary is said to have been a form of self-examination, leading to the narrative of the autobiography and the experience of his major conversion to transcendentalist Christianity:

This dialogue with myself went on. Meanwhile the world was darkening, and our work was growing precarious. Then my wife fell ill and had to go into a nursing home. After she began to recover, I was returning from the nursing home one day — it was the last day of February 1939 — when I saw some schoolboys playing at marbles on the pavement; the old game had 'come round' again at its own time, known only to children, and it seemed a simple little rehearsal for a resurrection, promising a timeless renewal of life. I wrote in my diary next day:

Last night, going to bed alone, I suddenly found myself (I was taking off my waistcoat) reciting the Lord's Prayer in a loud, emphatic voice. (Auto, p.246)

The strategy of the autobiography is, then, to concentrate on creating the image of the last 'conversion' as the most important and most desirable event of the decade, by pouring a lofty scorn on his earlier political activities and by ignoring the published manifestations of those political interests which were not so easy to manipulate into accord. Muir's critics, however, have found it harder to follow his lead here than from any other part of the autobiography, since the public row over Scott and Scotland forces them to acknowledge his involvement with the Renaissance Movement and attempt to deal with it as best they can. In this endeavour they have not been markedly successful.

Butter does discuss the issues of his involvement with Scottish matters in Man and Poet, but in such a way as to make them seem secondary — and entirely unrelated — to the religious developments of the period. Although ten pages of the twenty-five on 'St Andrews 1935-1939' deal with the published writings, the strategy of orderly précis and explicatory comment generally follows Muir's own emphasis by suggesting that this work was merely and coincidentally a background to the more important spiritual events. Scottish Journey is first mentioned towards the end of Chapter VI:

In June 1934 he went to Scotland for a PEN Conference, and then set off from Edinburgh, in an old car given him by Stanley Cursiter, on his 'Scottish Journey'. The Cursiters went to see him off as he passed their house just outside the city; he came bowling along, stopped at traffic lights, looked up and enquired whether it was the red or the green that meant "go". The car — a 1921 Standard — evidently had quite a personality of its own; and his rather inefficient handling of it is one of the humours of the book. (M & P, p.135)

This paragraph is entirely dependent on Butter's having accepted the persona of Scottish Journey not as an aspect of the work, but as an aspect of Edwin Muir himself who just happens to be writing a book. Since Muir adapted the 'Moore' persona according to the special purposes of each work, mirroring the changes in his own ideology with developments in his literary identity, Butter has little difficulty in selecting the attribute of the Scottish Journey persona most compatible with the autobiographical persona—his technical incompetence — and making this the first point in his discussion of the book.³ When he discusses the book in more detail, he claims to be doing so 'from a special point of view, trying to understand his attitude to Scotland at the time he returned to live there and the attitude of Scotsmen to him' (M & P, p.147); yet his first comment has been that Scottish Journey

3. Due to Mackay Brown's emphasis on this aspect of Muir; such anecdotes have become overly familiar. For example, he devotes considerable space to emphasising that 'Edwin was not a good driver': 'Once at least he had to appear in the magistrate court in Edinburgh for being involved in some minor road accident. And in Kirkwall, Orkney, one morning about a year later, I saw a stationary black car in close contact with the corner of a draper's shop. Outside on the street stood Edwin Muir, looking at the scene with bewildered helplessness. A chunk of cement from the corner of the draper's shop was lying on the pavement. Edwin, it seems, was responsible for it all. The car was not apparently damaged, for later that afternoon Edwin was driving Willa, Gavin and myself through a narrow street in Kirkwall. Suddenly the car stalled, stopped dead, and refused to start again. It was Monday, the market day and the town was full of farmers. Unfortunately this narrow street led to the Auction Mart, where the farmers had most of their business that day, buying and selling live stock. Very soon there was a pile-up of angry farmers' cars behind Edwin's car. For the second time that day Edwin stood outside his car looking helplessly round him.' (A Brief Memoir, p.11). The image of the transcendentalist man incompetent in dealing with the mechanical world is completed when Brown recalls that Muir's cousin, a business man from Glasgow on holiday in Orkney, was able to mend the car quite easily.

'contains much quiet humour, sensitive descriptions of landscape, and passages in which the poet takes over from the social critic' (M & P p.147), automatically valuing the former before the latter and failing to appreciate the significance of the book in Muir's development.

Social Credit and the Labour Party is dissociated from the move to Scotland when it is referred to only as one of the pieces to be tidied up after the move from Hampstead: Butter writes,

During that autumn they were very busy clearing up work left over from London. In that year they produced no less than five volumes of translations as well as his Scottish Journey and his pamphlet on Social credit. (M & P, p.148)

This publication is the only piece Muir devoted entirely to the political and economic scheme which was one of his chief interests and which became a major component in his ideology. Moreover, it was written at a crucial moment during his last struggles to reconcile his Scottishness and his socialism with his Anglo-centric authoritarianism: and to mention it only in passing seems to mark an unnecessarily restrictive view of Muir's canon.

Furthermore, Scott and Scotland's appearance in Butter's study is closely attended by the citation of Bruce's opinion that Muir 'was quite unaware of the storm which his earnest attempt to state the truth accurately as he saw it was to arouse' (M & P, p.152). The vocabulary here is redolent of that used in praising the autobiography, where making 'earnest' attempts 'to state the truth accurately as he saw it' is portrayed as the defining activity of that persona. The implication is that Scott and Scotland is 'not a wholly convincing book' (M & P, p.152) because the subject matter somehow failed to be appropriate to his

level of analysis. 'He was a too quick despairer with regard to the possibilities of the Scots language' (M & P, p.154) ignores the wider cultural and political elements of Muir's argument, suggesting that the question of language is Muir's chief concern and is separable from the rest of the thesis: the weight of Butter's account would seem to be directed towards supporting the notion that the book's conclusions were drawn not from ideological conviction — however confused and temporary that may have been — but from an 'uncharacteristic' haste of judgement.

There is no attempt to examine any of these books as literary constructions, nor to discern the development in opinion between the early and late 1930s. Butter further reinforces the structure Muir wished to be discerned in this period by following his account of the events leading to his conversion precisely, and by extending the quotations Muir gave from his diary.

Writers on the Scottish Renaissance Movement have noted Muir's contribution, but mostly in isolation from his complete oeuvre, and often in the spirit of MacDiarmid's invective. As late as 1968 Duncan Glen, for example, could still write covertly against Muir from within the terms of that rather one-sided feud,⁴ without attempting to

4. It is worth noting that Muir did debate the issue publicly on at least one occasion. He wrote to the BBC on 4 November 1954 that he was willing to discuss the Renaissance in a programme in the Heritage series:

'Yes, I think I should like to take part in the discussion on 25 November, but it might be worthwhile to find out beforehand if C.M. Grieve would consent to take part if I were there; I have no objection myself if he has none.' (BBC archive, Reading, Muir File III 1939-57).

Although no transcripts or records of the programme appear to have survived, The Radio Times listing for 25 November 1954 bills the programme, listing Grieve, Muir, Douglas Young and David Daiches as participants under the chairmanship of Alistair Borthwick.

understand the wider context of the quarrel:

Edwin Muir could write till he was blue in the face that the example of MacDiarmid should be ignored and that we have no choice but to absorb the English tradition. But the choice is there. The choice is not between following the example of Muir or the example of MacDiarmid. The choice is between rejecting ourselves and being ourselves. It has nothing to do with a choice between English and Scots. That will be an aspect of the result, but the choice is between deliberately censoring ourselves (consciously or unconsciously) to meet the demands of economic, social and non-literary pressures, and writing as ourselves.⁵

Glen does not seem to think it relevant that those 'economic, social and non-literary pressures' may have had a hand in determining Muir's personal option and his advocacy of that choice in his discussions of Scottish literature.

Other of Muir's critics have followed Butter more closely, albeit implicitly as often as explicitly. Elizabeth Huberman, Tom Scott and Roger Knight, for example, all treat his relations with Scotland as if they were comprised solely of his Orcadian childhood and Glaswegian youth. Articles which take this relationship as their chief topic seem vitiated by a lack of conviction that they are dealing with anything other than some minor detail of Muir's work which ought to be tidied up for the sake of scholarly completeness. Margery McCulloch, for example, begins with the unexceptionable (and unexceptional) statement that 'Edwin Muir's relationship with Scotland was an equivocal one',⁶ but she makes no attempt to suggest an explanation for this beyond repeating the

5. Akros, III (7 March 1968), p.8-9.

6. 'Edwin Muir and Scotland', Akros, XVI 47 (August 1981), p.67-81 (67).

clichéd attribution of his occasional verbal awkwardness to the Orcadian background:

His Norse-influenced origins and his consequent sense of linguistic dislocation both from the English language and from the rich spoken Scots of the Borders and Lowlands which formed the kernel of Hugh MacDiarmid's personal 'synthetic' Scots, led him to over-estimate the role of language in his analyses of the possibilities inherent in Scotland's literary revival, and to discuss the language situation in the thirties in terms frequently more relevant to that of the age of Burns. (p.67)

The examination remains little more than a catalogue of Muir's works and articles on Scotland and Scottish issues, ignoring the political dimensions of those pieces in favour of consideration of such points as that 'Calvinist influence can be seen... in his reworking of Greek myth' (p.77). Without a wider and deeper understanding of the overall shape of Muir's career, of the forces which determined it and of literary techniques which constituted its infrastructure, individual works will continue to be seen merely as the starting point for such speculations.

V 2

Although, due mainly to Grieve's campaign against it, discussion of Muir's views on Scottish politics, culture and literature has customarily centred on Scott and Scotland, the republication of Scottish Journey in 1979 did improve the general awareness of the complexity of the topic. McCulloch's article, for example, does take some earlier work into account. However, since her attitude to the

issue is as conditioned as Butter's by the conventional reading of the autobiography, this change is merely chronologically cosmetic. Only by an examination of the writings of the decade opposing Andrew Noble's thematic organisation of some of the texts⁷ can it be seen that the ambivalence Muir shows in dealing with Scotland is not part of a simple, continuous process of sloughing off political and national vestiges in the development towards pure spirit.

Muir's published writings on Scotland can be divided into three groups: the essays and reviews of the 1920s, done before he gave up periodical writing in 1929; the commissioned biography of John Knox, The Three Brothers and Poor Tom; and the articles and reviews from 1931 leading up to Scottish Journey and Scott and Scotland and continuing after 1936, although at a much diminished rate, throughout his life (including his many broadcasts, especially in the 1940s, for BBC Scotland). While the major books clearly demand individual consideration, it would be misleading to read them as spontaneous manifestations of well-formed opinion outwith the context of the articles which chart the development of his views. And although his private correspondence shows that he never resolved the problems which he tackled, the publications do reveal shifts in attitude and in emphasis indicative of the conflicting pressures exerted by the different components of his ideology as he struggled to come to terms with the Scottish element of his identity. The decision to evade the problem by adopting a term of supposedly apolitical transcendence then appears as - at least in part - a political as much as a spiritual movement.

Muir's writings on Scotland really begin with the articles he

7. Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism, edited and introduced by Andrew Noble (1982).

sent to The Freeman in 1923. Having maintained the determinedly English persona of 'Edward Moore' throughout the 'Our Generation' series, he responded to the sudden relaxation of that restraint with a sudden burst of activity in the area of Scottish literature.

He had talked of simple homesickness for Scotland while in Europe, writing to his sister that 'for one brought up in Scotland there is no place like Scotland, and I've become intensely sentimental about that country at intervals ever since I left it' (December 1922, Letters, p.24); but there was a significant political dimension to this regret at not being a part of the developments he discerned from abroad:

The Scottish election results, combined with the recent temper of the Glasgow group in Parliament, gave us quite a thrill. Things have changed enormously since I lived in Glasgow, only a little over five years ago (it seems far longer). The Scottish members should make a move for Scottish Home Rule, and then they would have the field to themselves. Do you know if that idea has taken hold of the Socialist parties in Glasgow or not? There's a man C.M. Grieve, a Socialist, running the idea in The Scottish Nation — a very bad paper which I sometimes see. When I see things stirring up so much I would like to be back to take a hand in the work... Perhaps in a few years Scotland will be a Socialist republic. I shouldn't wonder: things are moving so fast. (December 1923, Letters, p.29-30)

In none of Muir's writings is there any mention of the pre-war work of the Scottish socialist republicans, such as John MacLean, and it seems clear from his excitement at the notion that the idea was quite novel to him in 1923, and did not at this time conflict with his understanding of Social Credit. Although he described The Scottish Nation as 'a very bad paper' (Letters, p.30), he sent Grieve 'The Assault on Humanism' for republication there, and replied to Grieve's response in

subsequent issues. The same eagerness to engage with development in Scottish literature is discernible in his review of Annals of the Five Senses (C200). The first paragraph of this article laments the state of Scottish publishing and reviewing; but it is written not from his own point of view so much as to interest and flatter his audience. The emphasis is on the unfortunate effects the present system may have on the metropolitan English reader:⁸

How little we know of contemporary literature! By a series of happy accidents I came recently into possession of a remarkable book. It was published this year; it is full of unusual literary virtues; yet in none of the literary reviews have I seen a single mention of it. It might have been printed in Central Africa and distributed among natives who could not read, for all I might have known a few weeks ago; and, like most people who write about books, I watch with vigilance, which is somewhat like despair, over those customary notices which tell one so little unless one reads between the lines. I reflected that there might well be a dozen or more other volumes worth reading lost in the hurry of the publishing seasons, until I began to realise that the present volume had less than the usual chance and a preliminary send-off which explained convincingly its obscurity. Its author does not reside in London, and, moreover, he is his own publisher. (C200)

8. The argument is similar to that of T.S. Eliot:

If the English are to preserve the English way of life it is important for them that the Scottish and the Welsh should preserve theirs. The latter... may think that the danger to their culture is of its being replaced by another culture, that of England. But the forces which are destructive of traditional culture in one part of the island are at work in the whole of it; as the culture of Scotland and Wales disappears, the culture of England disappears too.

'Cultural Diversity and European Unity'.

Review-45, II 2 (Summer 1945), p.61-69 (64).

Muir concentrates on placing Grieve not within Scottish culture but by comparison with the international figures of modern (and, arguably, modernist) literature, a framing held to be possible precisely by virtue of his Scottishness:

It is as if an alien were writing in English without attempting to be English in anything but his language. Now this has not been very often done. Stevenson did not do it, although in essentials he was as unlike an Englishman as possible; nor has Mr Conrad done it, Mr Conrad, who has almost succeeded in being more English than the English themselves. Mr James Joyce has perhaps succeeded better than anyone else; and in a something exotic and almost excessively accomplished in his style, Mr Grieve is not unlike Mr Joyce; and I should say that, except Mr Joyce, nobody at present is writing more resourceful English prose. Mr Grieve is a Scot; that is, he is more intellectually subtle and on the whole less sane than the English who write English. Like Mr Joyce he takes a delight in the subtle windings of the intellect for their own sake, and, like Mr Joyce again, that delight is in him partly sensuous. This, which must make the book appear foreign to English readers, is part of its originality. It could only have been written by a Scotsman, and one of a type quite unguessed at by other peoples. (G 200)

This review appeared in November 1923, and despite the anomaly that Annals of the Five Senses is written in English, its terms are precisely those of Grieve's 'Theory of Scots Letters' which had been serialised in The Scottish Chapbook in February, March and April of that year.⁹ Those pieces perhaps suggested to Muir the comparison with Joyce by an early comment that

9. C.M. Grieve, 'A Theory of Scots Letters', The Scottish Chapbook, I 7 (February 1923), p.180-4, I 8 (March 1923), p.210-4 and I 9 (April 1923), p.240-4.

We have been enormously struck by the resemblance — the moral resemblance — between Jamieson's Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish language and James Joyce's Ulysses. A vis comica that has not been liberated lies bound by desuetude and misappreciation in the recesses of the Doric: and its potential uprising would be no less prodigious, uncontrollable, and utterly at variance with conventional morality than was Joyce's tremendous outpouring. (The Scottish Chapbook, I 7, p.183)

The notion that Grieve is taking 'a delight in the subtle windings of the intellect for their own sake', and one that is at least 'partly sensuous' and therefore foreign to English modes of thought and feeling, reflects at one remove Grieve's own enthusiasm for

Words and phrases in the Vernacular which thrill me with the sense of having been produced as a result of mental processes entirely different from my own and much more powerful. They embody observations of a kind which the modern mind makes with increasing difficulty and weakened effect. (The Scottish Chapbook, I 8, p.211)

Muir's claim is that Grieve has achieved the effects he sought in Scots by his own idiosyncratic use of English, opening out a modern(ist) sensibility and psychology through an experimental use of language. This adoption and adaptation of Grieve's principles and values for use in a review of a book written in English, for the predominantly English readers of The New Age, could only most fancifully be seen as the first instance of Muir's disillusionment with the use of Scots: rather, it seems evidence of the extent of his acceptance of the basic tenets of Grieve's programme — and these precepts recur in later reviews of MacDiarmid's poetry.

The strategy of the rest of the article is typical of many of his pieces on MacDiarmid: having aroused the reader's interest by a

discussion in general terms, Muir provides a sizeable quotation whose difficulty he concedes with the comforting assurance that there is no more difficult passage in the book, and he ends with a more straightforward recommendation to the reader than is his practice with most of the other books he reviews.¹⁰

Although Muir complained during his six-month stay in Montrose in 1924 that he and his wife found Scotland 'a sad disappointment to us after all the longing we had for it, so shut in, unresponsive, acridly resolved not to open out and live' (Letters, p.41), this disillusionment was not reflected in his published writings. Using his growing reputation as a reviewer, he began to propagandise for Grieve's movement, first introducing the concept of the Scottish Renaissance to the readers of the American Saturday Review of Literature in October 1925. Again, he does so entirely within the terms of the Movement as described by MacDiarmid, but not uncritically: referring to the first mentioning of the idea by 'Mr McDiarmid's friend and colleague, Mr C.M. Grieve', he argues that

The Scottish Nation was short-lived; the writers whom Mr Grieve expected to arrive did not appear, and the public was cold.

The Scottish Chapbook, a monthly miscellany of Scottish poetry, ran the same course and had to be discontinued at the same time. It was in the main very poor, and decisively below the level of

10. This is Mr Grieve at his most abstract and difficult, and it seems to me that there he is best... There are faults and to spare in the book, as I have tried to show; but as an achievement in style it deserves the attention of everyone still capable of maintaining an attitude of expectancy towards contemporary literature, and I heartily recommend it to them.' (C 200)

even the worst English reviews; but it was redeemed by the occasional appearance of Mr Grieve's prose, of poems by Mr MacDiarmid, and of various contributions by Mr G.R. Malloch. These represent thus far the net achievement of the Renaissance. (C 299)

Since he is obviously no fanatical partisan, his opinions of Sangschaw assume more weight. Again, he places MacDiarmid in an international and 'un-English' context, and this time he makes the claim of 'modernity' quite explicitly if embarrassedly: the book, he says, is

even more unlike contemporary English poetry than that of Mr Yeats and Mr Russell, and it is as little as theirs parochial. Mr MacDiarmid's intellectual competence cannot be gainsaid, nor his modernity, to use an awkward but necessary word. He is by no means a mere dialect poet, a successor of the sentimental rhymers who have written in all the dialects of Scots because they have not known any other language. He has chosen Scots, rather, as a serious vehicle for all that a writer may desire to express. He has partly chosen it, partly created it, for the language he uses is one derived from all the Scots dialects, a composite language. (C299)

Although he describes 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' as a 'decorative' poem, and claims that 'MacDiarmid' is 'more incontestably a poet in poems such as "Country Life"', the implementation and the advocacy of MacDiarmid's ideas in his rejection of dialect status and sentimental attitudes, the espousal of seriousness and the welcoming of synthetic Scots, make Muir the most useful propagandist for the Renaissance furth of Scotland. This role is continued in his review of A Drunk Man for the readers of The Nation and Athenaeum: for a less enterprising audience than he had addressed through The New Age, Muir omits the

general comments on Scottish and English psychology and discusses the poem in terms of its structure, variety and power, ending, again, with a reassuring word for those chary of reading anything not in standard English: 'There is a glossary at the end which unfortunately is not complete; but even as it stands it should make the poem easily readable even by those who are not accustomed to Braid Scots' (C343).¹¹ In the same year, 1927, he writes to his brother-in-law of his distanced involvement with Scottish literature and politics:

When we were in Scotland last time we heard a lot about Scottish Nationalism from C.M. Grieve (Hugh McDiarmid) who wrote A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle. It seems a pity that Scotland should always be held back by England, and I hope the Scottish Republic comes about: it would make Scotland worth living in. Grieve is a strong nationalist, republican, socialist, and everything that is out and out. He thinks that if Scotland were a nation we would have Scottish literature, art, music, culture and everything that other nations seem to have and we haven't. I think that would probably be likely; but I feel rather detached, as I've often told Grieve, because after all I'm not Scotch, I'm an Orkney man, a good Scandinavian, and my true country is Norway, or Denmark, or Iceland, or somewhere like that. But this is nonsense, I'm afraid, though

11. The technique is still in use in 1931 when he reviews To Circumjack Cencrastus for The Criterion:

To Circumjack Cencrastus is in Scots, but I imagine it should give no very great difficulty to an English reader. It is a pity that the author has not provided a small glossary for then there need not have been any difficulty at all. But I shall quote one of the harder passages, merely to show that, even when some of the words are strange to him, the reader can gather from their sound the atmosphere and mood the author wished to convey... this is a good example of the daring and vitality of 'Hugh M'Diarmid's' language, and as it is very much more difficult than nine-tenths of the poem, I hope that the English reader will see that he need not fear the book, and that to attempt it will repay him. (C398)

there's some sense in it. (Letters, p.64)

There is no point in this letter on which Muir disagrees with Grieve; on the contrary, it is a collection of arguments in favour of Scottish political and cultural autonomy. When Muir raises the objection of his Orcadian background, it is not to dissociate himself from Grieve's battles, but to excuse his own lack of fervour: and as such, with the uncomfortable search for a country with an alternative claim to his allegiance, with the rather odd, almost desperate suggestion that he truly belongs to Iceland and, indeed, with his own concession that the whole train of thought is becoming nonsensical, it is a notable failure.¹²

It may be understandable that in talking of his relation to a nationalist movement he should immediately think in terms of elements of his identity not simply 'Scottish'; but the frequent reiteration of this explanation by his critics has done nothing to relieve its superficiality. It would seem far more likely that the unspoken reservations which he is trying to interpret here were rooted in the arguments he was to produce when he began to split with MacDiarmid over Scottish issues: and these were not based in his Orcadian nationality, but in the bourgeois desire for a strong central authority that he had absorbed through his association with The New Age and its philosophical underpinning in Social Credit theory.

12. If a single opposing quotation were enough to counteract the exaggerated significance critically accorded this letter, it would be necessary only to cite a statement in 'Extracts from a Diary 1937-39': 'I am for a Scottish Nation, because I am a Scotsman', The Story and the Fable, p.260.

Muir first hints of this centralism in the appendix to John Knox.
He writes to John Buchan:

My appendix on Scotland is, I cordially agree, inadequate; and I can only explain both its tone and its brevity by my surprise at the generalisations of other writers. (Letters, p.65-6)

The conclusion to the book is untidily structured and impressionistic. Citing the inflated opinions of earlier historians as having drawn him into dispute, he enumerates aspects of Knox's tradition — prophecy, denunciation, the institution of the Kirk Session — which he feels have been damaging to Scotland. The contention of Scott and Scotland, following Weber,¹³ that Scottish Calvinism paved the way for the extreme forms to be taken by the industrial revolution, is nodded at, but not explored: echoing 'Moore's' tone, he says that 'without going into the recondite question of the steam engine, there seem to be certain developments and phases of Scottish life which may not unreasonably be traced to Knox' (p.305). He passes over the role of the Enlightenment (as he does again in Scott and Scotland) with the concession that 'Hume, Burns and men like them, it is true, lifted the country from its isolation for a time during the next hundred years', as a preface to his final generalisation:

What Knox really did was to rob Scotland of all the benefits of the Renaissance. Scotland never enjoyed these as England did, and no doubt the lack of that immense advantage has had a permanent effect. It can be felt, I imagine, even at the present day. (John Knox, p.309)

13. Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism was first published serially in the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, XX-1 (1904-5) and translated into English by Talcott Parsons in 1930. That its contentions are particularly applicable to Scottish development has been reaffirmed by Gordon Marshall, Presbyteries and Profits (1980).

What Muir meant by suggesting to Buchan that the tone of this piece requires explanation is clear even in this short excerpt: the distancing, urbane, almost cynical note of 'I imagine' like the reference to 'the recondite question of the steam engine', is a further development of 'Edward Moore's' voice. But the main point of Muir's complaint is already Scotland's peripheral nature, its failure to partake in the Renaissance movement centred in Europe as England had done.

Muir recommenced publishing periodical essays on Scotland after his novel-writing with an article on 'The Scottish Renaissance' in The New Freeman of March 1931 (C395). By this time The Marionette had collapsed, and The Three Brothers seemed likely to follow suit: he had written to Schiff in April that 'the book, I should say, has been a pretty complete failure publicly, and there's little more to be said about it; so I have started on another one' (Letters, p.69). Despite the optimism of this note, some bitterness induced by that collapse — and possibly the start of the loss of hope — are reflected in the opening paragraph of the article:

Scotland is a country which for two hundred years has been steadily losing its nationality. Like those triangles which puzzle schoolboys, its centre lies outside itself. For a long time and amid many vicissitudes, that centre was Edinburgh; for a considerable time, amid the peaceful order of Great Britain, so much like sleep, it has been London. The more ambitious and serious writers whom Scotland produced last century strove to identify themselves with the English tradition; and Carlyle, Stevenson, James Thomson and John Davidson are figures in English literature as they wished to be. With the secession of her best, Scotland was delivered over to the sentimentalists and

provincials, and as a national entity was contented to be represented by the Kailyard School and the pawky village poet. (C395)

From this point, the notion of the lack of a Scottish centre becomes an obsession, raised in nearly every article, and dominating Scott and Scotland. A new stringency appears in his discussion of the Scottish Renaissance: for example, in comparison with the 1925 article of the same title (C299), this piece constitutes a more open dismissal of the origins of the movement as being anything other than Grieve's own will-power: 'There was actually not the faintest sign of a Scottish Renaissance at the time', he notes briskly.

Yet his commendation of To Circumjack Cencrastus, as 'an astonishing work, and the erratic but genuine expression of a poet of genius', and his gathering of the work of contemporary novelists, under Grieve's banner, shows no lessening of his own commitment to the Movement. Indeed, with this review for Eliot's Criterion (C398), he continues to propagandise for the movement in magazines to which his work of the early 1920s had gained him access. But his belief in the need for a centre continues to grow, and the conflict between his desire to be part of the Renaissance movement and to maintain his centralism are almost pitiably revealed in the restless vacillations

in his letter of September 1931 to James Whyte.¹⁴ Its essence is caught in a particularly anguished half-paragraph:

A Scottish writer is in a false position because Scotland is in a false position. Yes that's what it comes down to; and now that I think of it, that is what fills me with such a strong desire to see Scottish Literature visibly integrated in a Scottish group living in Scotland for that would make the

14. 'I did not think that there was much immediate hope of an economically self-supporting Scottish literature - and it may be that there isn't ever any ultimate hope of it. You are on the spot, and far more in touch with things than I am; and your findings - with which I can do nothing but agree - are pretty hopeless. But if there is no ultimate hope of such a consummation - or even no hope of it in our life-time - I think I am clear too on this further point; that Scottish literature as such will disappear, and that London will become quite literally the capital of the British Isles in a sense that it has never yet quite been; that, in other words, it will become our national capital in just as real a sense as it is the capital of an ordinary English man to-day. How long it will take for this to happen it is impossible to say - a few centuries, or only one, what does it matter? 'Hugh MacDiarmid' will become a figure like Burns - an exceptional case, that is to say - an arbitrary apparition of the national genius, robbed of his legitimate effect because there will be not literary tradition to perpetuate it. Scottish literature will continue to be sporadic - and being sporadic, it will be denied the name of a literature, and it seems to me rightly so. But for myself I feel so detached, when I look at this possibility objectively, that I cannot even quite exclude the thought that this resolution of the Scottish spirit, its disappearance finally into a larger spiritual group, to which it would inevitably contribute much, may be a consummation to be hoped for. At any rate, all things seem to me to be working for it: the fact that Scottish energy has gone mainly into international forms of activity, finance, industry, engineering, philosophy, science - forms of activity where one's nationality is irrelevant; the fact Scotsmen have helped to shape the industries of so many other countries and neglected their own: their almost complete blindness or indifference to the forms of activity in which the spirit of a nation most essentially expresses itself - poetry, literature, art in general: all this, looked at from outside might almost make us imagine that Scotland's historical destiny is to eliminate itself in reality, as it has already wellnigh eliminated itself from history and literature - the forms in which a nation survives. But the really awful phase is the present one: we are neither quite alive nor quite dead; we are neither quite Scottish (we can't be, for there's no Scotland in the same sense that there is an England and a France), nor are we quite delivered from our Scottishness, and free to integrate ourselves in a culture of our choice. It was some such dim feeling as this that

position unequivocal, or at least would be a first step towards doing it; it would not merely be a gesture or an expedient, but a definite act, and therefore with a symbolical value. England can't digest us at the present stage, and besides one doesn't want to be digested - it is a shameful process - one wants to be there. And there is no there for Scotsmen. And the idea that there might be is, I feel sure, a dream. Like Scottish Nationalism and the great digestive act, Scotland will probably linger in limbo as long as the British Empire lasts. It seems inevitable. (Letters, p.71)

For Muir, a strong, single centre is the defining characteristic of a culture: without such a constitution, he believes it cannot exist, no matter how much he may want it to be: 'One wants to be there. And there is no there for Scotsmen'. It is Muir's inability to see a way round this impasse that leads from his association with The New Age and his reading of Eliot to his quarrel with MacDiarmid.

Footnote 14 (cont'd.)

made me take up the question. The very words 'a Scottish writer' have a slightly unconvincing ring to me: what they come down to (I except Grieve, who is an exception to all rules) is a writer of Scottish birth. But when we talk of an English writer we do not think of a writer of English birth: we hardly think of such things at all. A Scottish writer is in a false position, because Scotland is in a false position....

All the same, at suitable opportunities, and when I feel like it, I am going to have a shot at advocating an indigenous Scottish school of literature in Scotland. I'm glad that you are thinking of writing an editorial about it. I think it should be pressed in the B.B.C. Don't you occasionally speak for them? The weekly review I pin little faith to; it would be inadequate for the purpose in any case. And I don't know why I brought the matter up at all except as a protest. It will have no effect in my own life, which will go on pretty much as it has gone, except for the possible accident that I may manage yet to write something better than I've written so far. Which is quite a praiseworthy wish.'

(Letters, p.70-1)

While he continues to write in favour of the aims of the Renaissance in a general sense¹⁵, Muir's interest begins to focus in the early 1930s on the political and economic roots of the Scottish malaise, but his articles still show an inability to break the deadlock between the differing elements of his identity. Prompted by the effects of the Depression, Muir takes exception to the middle-class attitude of most Scottish Nationalists. In a note on 'The Main Problem' in 1932 he despises the notion of replacing Westminster with 'a little Edinburgh House of Commons', wishing for a synchronised cultural and political renaissance. Still vacillating, he concludes:

So far as I can see it is... an impossible dream. Nevertheless without something of the kind I can see no future for the national movement in Scotland except a purely bourgeois one, in which case it would deserve no more attention than Prohibition or Empire Free Trade. (C412)

The confusion of components constituting Muir's ideology is perhaps never more apparent than in these writings of the mid 1930s. These pieces above all make it clear that his shift in 1939 to a supposedly 'apolitical', religious transcendentalism was not a rejection of a formerly simple political nationalism, but rather an attempt to evade the apparently unresolvable war between the different elements of his personal ideology.

His difficulty with political nationalism was as dependent on the influences of his move to England as were his problems with the cultural Renaissance Movement. In a letter of 1934 he writes:

15. For example, they have the same enemies: his article on 'Scottish Letters in 1931' (C402a) is largely an attack on the Kailyard melodrama of Hatter's Castle, for instance.

I don't know how Scottish Nationalism is to survive in the general revolution that seems to be sweeping over all civilization. It seems to be a counter-movement, but it may be simply another form of the general process. I'm all for it in any case. (Letters, p.80)

This is the argument, though not the conclusion, of Scottish Journey: that nationalism is essentially a bourgeois notion and as such is opposed to — or at least a diversion from — the socialism which is daily more urgently required to counteract the rise of fascism. The paradoxes of Muir's arguing this case are many: in the same year as Scottish Journey appeared, Social Credit and the Labour Party was also published, contending that Douglasism is the only effective means of achieving that desired socialism without upsetting the bourgeois stability Muir defends. The basis of his dissatisfaction with Nationalism would seem to be his earlier commitment to the work of the Independent Labour Party, although the nature of that commitment had not been such that it could prevent his seduction by Social Credit, nor enable him to distinguish between the 'bourgeois nationalism' of most members of the SNP and the alignment of socialism and nationalism in MacDiarmid's plans for the Renaissance. He may argue that the effectual reason for Scotland's cultural, political and economic emasculation 'was Scotland's loss of her separate nationality' (C487); but his attempt to reconcile his faith in a central authority with the evidence of collapse which he detects around him can result only in the plea for a new Scottish centre, for a tartan metropolitanism in accordance with the notion of Scotland having displaced her focus, which would lead only to a return to the split between country and city said to have helped destroy Burns (C153).

If his faith in Social Credit revives at this time, so too does the

totalising concern that had been a hallmark of The New Age and of the 'Our Generation' column. Although in these years he writes roughly as many articles and reviews based on social and political topics as on more purely literary ones, the boundary between the two is no longer as rigid as it had been in the mid 1920s when Muir was establishing the broader basis of his career in London. For example, in reply to Grieve's request for an article on the function of Scotland in the modern world, Muir argues that any small nation with 'some independent central organ directing and symbolising its life' must, if only by virtue of its geographical position, affect the other organic societies surrounding it and thereby influence 'the general course of civilization'. Scotland, again because she has no such centre, is said to belong rather to the category of 'hypothetical units, units which remain in a condition of unchanging suspended potentiality' and therefore can have 'no calculable effect, as an entity, on the development of civilization' (C421), showing Muir to be explicitly judging the political situation of the country in terms of its generalised cultural effects. Similarly, his article on 'Bolshevism and Calvinism' (C437) draws parallels between the two not in terms of doctrine, but in terms of their characteristics as cultural phenomena: the significant similarities are enumerated as their foundation on a deterministic theory envisaging inevitable ultimate victory, their taking inspiration from a single book to which infallibility is attributed, their relegation of secular literature to a secondary place, their elaboration of a completely new political system and mechanism, their seeking the supremacy of a single, repressed class (the elect/the proletariat), their revolt against the romanticisation of sex, their revolutionary and international character, their antipathy

towards traditional culture, and their great faith in the power of education. The conclusion he draws from this analysis is the political one that Bolshevism has the potential to take over as absolutely as Calvinism once did should it not be prevented by the implementation of Social Credit theories.

A further example of this refusal to separate politics and culture comes in his attack on Ramsay MacDonald's speech at the unveiling of a statue to Burns in 1936: having analysed the 'involuntary', unconscious symbolism in structure of the occasion itself, and pointed out inconsistencies in the speech, his argument singles out a particular aspect of the complex relationship between politics and art:

It may not be true that all writers reflect the economic ideology of the society in which they live — I do not think it is — but, it does seem to be true that their writings are finally and in the long run made to reflect that ideology by a process of elimination and transformation, until the most influential classes in society can finally put their seal on the result. (C639)

The question of assimilation, to dominate Scott and Scotland, is clearly foreshadowed in this and Muir's complaint against that process, even as that study is as in the press, shows that the battle within had not ended. As the decade progresses, these articles and reviews gradually establish the arguments concerning Scottish culture which Muir expounds at greater length in the books: 'Scottish Poetry' (C472), 'Literature in Scotland' (C477) and 'Scott's Critics' (C651), for example, all depend on the loss of an 'organic' community as the notion that explains the current state of Scottish literature.

This consolidation of a temporary position should not, however, imply that Muir had somehow escaped from his personal conflicts to write

'honestly'. Each of these pieces is as deliberately crafted to meet the needs of convincing its likely audience of his case as any of the 'Our Generation' columns had been. For example, in reviewing No Mean City for The Spectator, Muir adopts, even for so short a piece, the persona of a concerned liberal advocating the book for its appalling 'but never deliberately sensational' revelations about the slums of Glasgow: there is no suggestion whatsoever that the author has had any personal experience of such conditions, and in fact the review seems to go to some lengths to suggest precisely the opposite:

The picture of overcrowding in this book is almost more horrible than the picture of cruelty and violence. Single rooms and stairhead lavatories seem to be the rule in the Gorbals; the houses are infested with bugs; there are no baths; and there is no privacy. The young rebel against their environment or try to escape from it: the gangs are doubtless an expression of this rebellion. This book is of great value because it describes from the inside a kind of life which exists not only in Glasgow but in all large manufacturing towns, yet is guessed at by very few people. (C573)

Muir appears to be taking his whole knowledge of conditions from the book itself: to say that these things 'seem' to be the rule and the gangs are 'doubtless' an expression of rebellion, is as far as he is willing to go on the basis of its evidence. Moreover, he takes care to emphasise that this is not too specific a problem, omitting all the painful details he could have added from his own memory, in order to make the point more immediately relevant to the liberal, mostly English, readers of The Spectator, whose concern would be generalised. Similarly, in his review of Thomson's Scotland: That Distressed Area for The Criterion he puts forward an argument in favour of Home Rule

for Scotland which is not mentioned anywhere else in his writings and which is precisely the only argument likely to appeal to the readers of that magazine in the light of its editor's faith in centralism and the centrality of English culture:

It is clear that Home Rule should in any case be freely granted by England now, both for her own sake and for the sake of Scotland; otherwise she may find that a still important part of her kingdom will have sunk past hope and past recovery. (C581)

In anticipating Eliot's own argument for the Scottish tradition in literature (Review - 45) Muir reveals a talent for the practicalities of propagandising undiminished since the days when he had anticipated Eliot's views on the Russian Ballet.

In the years following Scott and Scotland, Muir tends to avoid Scottish matters in print. There are, however, two letters which show the continuing ambivalence of his feelings about the position of Scottish culture and politics. Having written in 1936:

The Scottish Nationalists have been trying to get hold of me, but quite without success, for there seems to be only one side one can take now, and it is not Nationalism (Letters, p.91),

he nonetheless admits the continuing strength of nationalist feeling when he notes in 1940:

I've been able to write very little during the last two or three months, only a little poetry, and, very surprisingly, mostly in Scots — I expect that the present time is drawing us all back to our bases, a good thing in one way, I think. (Letters, p.123)

This sentence alone should have been enough to silence those critics

who habitually cite his Orkney childhood in expiation of Scott and Scotland. The bitterness of the tone of that book, however, persists too, as can be seen from his comments in a surprisingly unpublished letter on what he refers to as 'Dr John Lewis's bright idea': rejecting practical proposals for the kind of grouping he'd asked for in 1931 (Letters, p.71) he writes:

As for a Scottish Poets and Authors Group, I think the idea is wild, like most of Lewis's ideas, from what I can make out. These people have a bland, self-complacent ignorance of Scotland which is almost unbelievable... Do you really think that there is any possibility of forming a Scottish Poets and Authors Group? How are they to group themselves, with one in Dundee, another in St Andrews, another in Orkney, another in Shetland, another in Barra, another in Dingwall, another (bedridden) in Perth, and a few in Glasgow and Edinburgh? I told Lewis this, but it must have slid off his fat head; he must have thought that I was manufacturing excuses instead of stating facts. I can't see how it is to be done, though I would be glad enough to be near a group of some kind.¹⁶

Muir's frustration at the failure of the Scottish Renaissance to establish the kind of central authority which both his political and cultural experiences in London had taught him to demand as essential to a healthy culture (although based only on the model of a healthy imperialist culture) is revealed in his abuse of the man who is putting forward plans for precisely such an embryonic grouping of cultural figures, in his exhaustive listing of the practical difficulties to be overcome which he regards as insuperable (including the rather cruel dig at William Soutar) and in his rather pathetic admission that

16. EM - William Montgomerie, 20.2.39, NLS ACC No. 6855.

for all his cynicism he would like to join this putative group if it could be brought into existence. This letter shows that in the course of the decade, the optimism of hoping for such a revitalisation had not been completely superseded by the bitterness against Scotland also becoming evident in 1931:

I fancy that almost every other country in the world gives its writers a chance to live in it, Scotland does not.¹⁷

Perhaps because of this frustration, there was one area of his work into which Muir concentrated his interest in Scottish topics and concerns after 1938: his work for the BBC.¹⁸ While he did occasionally

17. 'Why Scots Writers Emigrate', Evening News (2 September 1931), p.4.

18. Initially, the BBC were doubtful about both Muir's material and his voice. An internal memo of 18 March 1938 notes of his contribution to the Progress series that 'Muir's marked Scottish accent was disliked by many English groups, who also found his material unnecessarily allusive.' The Programme Director handling negotiations for The Book of Scotland felt it necessary to remind colleagues that Muir's work depended on 'the great cultural background he has built up, and when we use such men we must pay them for it' (31 October 1941), and such memos were necessary until the growth of his poetic reputation after the war.

In fact, there were frequent wrangles during his association with the BBC over money. For example, Muir asked that he again be paid 50 gns. for his St Andrew's day broadcast of 1937, but settled for 30 when told that he'd been paid at the standard metropolitan rate in 1936 and reminded to 'appreciate that we pay higher fees for a programme broadcast on a London or National wavelength than for one broadcast in a Region only' (21 October 1937). And an undated letter amongst correspondence of the early 1950s shows him still querying this discrimination when working on a poetry anthology. That the income derived from broadcasting was important is highlighted by a note from Edna Quade, 18 January 1943, saying that Muir had asked for advance payment for his work on The Road to Fotheringay, insensitively commenting 'He seems to be in financial difficulties!'. In the twenty years from 1936 to 1956 his total earnings from the BBC seem to have amounted to just over £1000 (BBC archive, Reading, Edwin Muir files I-III, 1936-60).

contribute scripts for such series as 'Masterpieces of English Literature' broadcast by the Indian Service, and took part in London broadcasts such as a discussion on 'The Writer and his Public' with Desmond Hawkins and V.S. Pritchett, his main involvement was with BBC Scotland. He adapted novels (for example, The Antiquary in 1939), and provided the scripts for several St Andrew's Day celebrations. In 1940 he devised a series entitled 'The Book of Scotland', intended to be a set of six programmes on 'Scottish liberty', to chime with war aims.¹⁹ Each was to be centred around 'moments when Scottish life seemed to crystallise into some new form', perhaps showing a slight relaxation of the insistence on centralism. He also edited the Scottish Chapbook programme monthly from April to December 1943, and contributed to many other numbers in the series as well as doing much occasional work.

The pattern of Muir's broadcasting can be described as a mixture of elements familiar from the development of his early reviewing and his novel-writing.²⁰ As in the 1920s, access to a new audience had been discovered, and he used the opportunity to explore further the Scottish situation and, by inference, his own position. But, repeating the development of the early thirties, lack of appreciation and the consequent meanness of remuneration turned broadcasting from a potentially major to a relatively minor area of his career. And with these restrictions on this medium effectively closing such broadcasts after the war, Muir virtually gave up the public debate on his Scottishness and withdrew into religious mysticism more completely still.

19. EM - Moultrie Kelsall, 3.8.40, BBC archive, Glasgow.

20. Unfortunately only fragmentary evidence of this work, such as his correspondence with BBC representatives, seems to survive.

V 3

Although Muir's investigation of his own country in Scottish Journey is the culmination to that date of a constant personal concern intensified by the commercial failure of his novels, it is also very much in keeping with the Zeitgeist of the early 1930s. The economic depression led to a spate of Mayhew-esque volumes, based on the genre conventions of the travel book informed with a consciousness of the development of sociological principles, that aimed to bring the facts of working-class life to the attention of the reading public. Scottish Journey was itself commissioned as one of a series that includes J.B. Priestley's English Journey; but a closer parallel might be drawn with George Orwell's The Road to Wigan Pier²¹ which it resembles not only in terms of general subject matter and compassionate stance, but also in the use of a literary persona through which the observed details of contemporary life are filtered and given form and have their ideological import determined.

While Muir was, from time to time, attracted by the notion of Scottish Republicanism, his socialism was founded in the labourite tradition of the I.L.P., and he was consequently committed to the reform of the existing economic system towards a socialist structure and opposed revolutionary change. This background made it easy for him to adopt the reforming policy of Social Credit and to join The New Age's venture of attempting to convert to that programme the great reforming

21. J.B. Priestly, English Journey (1934); George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (1937).

English middle-class. However, when his novels were published Muir discovered that if a Scottish middle-class existed, it lacked the kind of self-consciousness that had created a dependable novel-reading public in England; and Scottish Journey can be seen as an attempt not only to suggest a particular role for the Scottish bourgeoisie, as readers and as political agents, but to do so in the manner most likely to succeed in persuading that audience to accept the validity of his case. And again, Muir does this through the technique of creating a literary persona.

While it may seem elementary to observe that Scottish Journey is written in the first person, too many critics have simplistically ignored the notion of its being deliberately written altogether, forgetting that it is essentially a book, a literary construct, and not a vehicle for the unmediated currency of Edwin Muir's experience. The persona who writes in the first person here is clearly related to Muir, but only in ways selected in order to improve his efficiency as a propagandist device. For example, he shares some of the memories Muir was to record as his own in his autobiography, such as childhood on Orkney (SJ, p.218), the reading of Pilgrim's Progress on the farm (SJ, p.169), the arrival on the mainland (SJ, p.8) and work as a chauffeur on the outskirts of pre-war Glasgow (SJ, p.185); but 'he' does not share with Muir — nor, on a different level, with the reader — memories of conversion to Social Credit, because these would reveal him as a long-standing holder of political convictions for which he has previously written propaganda, and not permit him to maintain the pose of the plain, honest man with no particular axe to grind who is merely reporting empirically detected truths.

This is the function of the persona throughout the book: to conceal its propagandist nature behind an image of an honest and essentially apolitical reporter being forced to assume a plan of Social Credit theory as the only pragmatic response available to such a person faced with such conditions. Its role is to persuade the reader that an ideological commitment to Social Credit is to be seen not as a matter of political choice but as a natural state: it serves to depoliticise the political, so denying the full awareness of the implications of Muir's choice to the readers whom he wishes to persuade to emulate him.

This technique is most urgent in the beginning and ending of the book, when the reader is especially likely to reject both the persona and what he is offering. Scottish Journey opens with the statement that 'the first thought of writing this book came to me two years ago, one evening after I had driven through the mining district of Lanarkshire', so cutting out as much as possible of the reader's awareness of the book as a commercial product commissioned by a publisher and deliberately crafted: it becomes instead a personal response to the situation, and politically, a quite naïve one at this stage. In the introduction he stresses his own liberalism and impartiality to the point where he denies any existing opinion at the outset of the journey:

I should warn the reader, too, that this is not a survey of Scotland but a bundle of impressions: not the Scottish journey, but a Scottish journey. (SJ, p.4)

Yet, through its coverage of Edinburgh, Glasgow, the Borders and the Highlands, the book is precisely a survey of Scotland; and the purpose with which its impressions are organised renders it much more

consciously crafted than 'a bundle of impressions' would suggest.

Similarly, towards the end of the book, the persona refers to having been 'looking at Scotland as impartially as I could' (SJ, p.234): by admitting the possibility of bias, as when he talks of living in Glasgow for fifteen years (SJ, p.101), he describes himself as an honest liberal man and invites the reader to deny that there has been any such prejudice in the book. It is a rhetorical device no less effective for its simplicity.

A less direct agent in this depoliticisation is the use of highly poetic imagery and metaphor in the description of Scotland. By intensifying the individuality of the account, these passages also help to build up the sense of an identifiable person writing the book; but their primary function seems to be to distance the tone of the book from that usually associated with political propaganda. As such, these passages and this tone are very effective: the quality of perception and the literary cadences involved in writing of Princes Street as a railway platform on which waiting passengers are beginning to realise that the train will never arrive (SJ, p.16), of the habit of observation there being such that the individual 'has the feeling of breaking, as he passes, through a series of invisible obstacles, of snapping a succession of threads laden with some retarding current' (SJ, p.17), of the 'sea-change' accomplished by floating sexual desire in Edinburgh tea rooms (SJ, p.18-9), of the factory hands of Jedburgh as 'gunmen out for a walk which might not end harmlessly' (SJ, p.56), of discerning the features of George Bernard Shaw in a Chinese silk scroll kept at Abbotsford (SJ, p.58) or of the street dirt of Glasgow as an unwholesome 'soup' (SJ, p.115), are touched with a note of

whimsicality utterly foreign to the serious stridency conventional in the political pamphlet. Moreover, exemplifying the old totalising conviction of The New Age and 'Our Generation', such passages help at once to disguise and to express the political message of the book.

Almost paradoxically, the political significance is further played down by the unwavering determination of the persona to provide an economic explanation for everything he chooses to discuss. It is a technique which is used very gently, with the narrator surrounding his analyses with extended metaphors that win imaginative assent from the reader, thereby avoiding a challenge to any existing political conviction. For example, in describing the social separation of Edinburgh he claims that a big town is

like^a very big and inefficiently yet strictly run house... the servants have to submit to the strictest regulation, both in their working hours and their leisure. They have their quarters, for instance, to which they must keep. They must on no account sprawl about in the drawing-room, even in their spare time... There are streets in Edinburgh which correspond exactly to the drawing-room and the servants' hall. The people one meets in the first are quite different from the people one meets in the second. The crowds that walk along Princes Street, for instance, are a different race, different in their manners, their ideas, their feelings, their language, from the one in the Canongate... You never by chance find the Princes Street crowd in the Canongate, or the Canongate crowd in Princes Street; and without a revolution such a universal American Post is inconceivable. The entire existence of Edinburgh as a respectable bourgeois city depends on that fact. (SJ, p.10-11)

Similarly, when referring to clichéd elements of the image of Scots, he prefers to redefine the problem in terms of class: Scottish

drunkenness is said to be worse than English, for example, and he concedes that 'one might put down this difference to a difference of national temperament or of national religion or to a hundred other things', but he himself feels that

the question is not a very important or interesting one. Much more interesting is the difference which class distinction produces in drunkenness in a Scottish town. (SJ, p.14)

Reverting to the orthodox socialist line on nationalism, he discloses anti-Protestant prejudices in the middle of a passage which insists on an exclusively economic interpretation of society, even at the expense of ignoring major manifestation of elements of Scottish culture:

I actually intended at one point to say something about the churches, and in particular about the furious clashes between Orangemen and Catholics which fill the cells of the lock-ups after every St Patrick's Day. But these things do not matter; they have only a fictitious importance; and to try to understand an Orangeman's state of mind in any case would not only be extraordinarily difficult, but quite profitless, for the Orange superstition is surely one of the most insensate of existing superstitions, and also one of the most uninteresting.

Unfortunately the Orange demonstrators and marchers belong mainly to the working class, just as the Catholic ones do. This feud causes a great deal of trouble, and has not even the excuse of being justified by interest. It is sheer insane loss: a form of hooliganism under the cover of something too silly even to be called an idea. But in the final count it comes to almost nothing. The fundamental realities of Glasgow are economic. How is this collapsing city to be put on its feet again? (SJ, p.161-2)

Since the main rival to Social Credit for the allegiance of a putatively disaffected middle-class in Scotland in the early 1930s would have been the SNP, the book goes to some lengths to make

nationalism seem at best an irrelevance to the true issues, and at worst a potential danger. He dislikes the way in which the Scots are becoming 'almost contentedly' unhappy (SJ, p.30-1), and feels that this is because they fail to recognise that their economic plight is 'the only urgent question' (SJ, p.28); but Nationalism is condemned as 'over-weening and dangerous in a great nation, and niggling in a small one' (SJ, p.28). His later reference to the persecution of the Jews in Germany (SJ, p.181) links this analysis of contemporary German nationalism as resulting from a mixture of inflated pride and a sense of oppression added to its being essentially a 'morbid' symptom (SJ, p.28) to make any political Nationalism seem both silly and sinister.

The image of the persona is built up throughout the book . For instance, the reader knows that he is a man of some culture and literary specialisation from references such as those to Wordsworth (SJ, p.62), Dostoievsky (SJ, p.97-8), Belloc (SJ, p.105), Chesterton (SJ, p.240) and, above all, to King Lear in his discussion of the rates of dole money (SJ, p.134-6) and from the disproportionate amount of space devoted to discussing Scott (SJ, p.57-61) and Burns (SJ, p.88-94). The persona is perhaps most blatantly and successfully promoted, though, in the chapter dealing with the Highlands, the most lasting memory of which, judging from the critics' response, is of the technically inept narrator struggling to get the 1921 Standard up the succeeding mountains. A character so very obviously out of touch with the modern world is unlikely to be suspected of having anything other than unvarnished common sense to offer.

In its determined relegation of Nationalism to a secondary place in the solving of Scotland's problems and in its corresponding

elevation of Social Credit, Scottish Journey shows no profound development in Muir's thought, no resolution that was to be in any sense 'final' of the conflicting elements of his ideology. But in its confident handling of a persona that comes closer to being a fully-rounded character, one whose past is referred to more explicitly than in any previous work, and in its willingness to employ the full range of registers in its discussion of political issues in order to mask their very politicalness, the book constitutes a decisive step towards the technique of the autobiographical writings.

V 4

Social Credit and the Labour Party, published in December 1935, virtually constitutes a footnote to Scottish Journey in being a plea to Muir's working-class colleagues from his I.L.P. days to join the middle-classes in the fight for Social Credit. Perhaps betraying a growing suspicion that the Scottish bourgeoisie was not sufficiently developed to implement the policy alone (as its English counterpart, had it been convinced, was thought to have been), the main interest of the pamphlet nevertheless lies in its being an almost flawless exercise, albeit on a minor scale, in the handling of a persona.

It is cast in the form of a personal letter addressed to 'X', and begins with a paragraph of reminiscences designed to establish the writer's credentials as a true member of the Labour movement:

I often think of the time when we were in the Glasgow ILP together, studying economics and industrial history in the

same class, selling 'literature' at street-corner meetings and tentatively trying the strength of our own lungs. That was more than twenty years ago, before the War. It seems a happy time to me now. (SC & LP, p.5)

The sentimentality of this nostalgic approach confirms the view that Muir's aim is to convert older members of the Labour Party worried by the apparent necessity to choose between Communism and Fascism in the mid 1930s: he explicitly argues that one of the chief recommendations of Social Credit is its avoidance of revolution.

The most urgent argument against a violent revolution is the suffering it would be bound to bring; but that is not the only argument, nor, I think, even the most important one. In a violent upheaval many bad things are destroyed, but many good things are destroyed as well; and once a good thing is destroyed it can never be replaced again. (SC & LP, p.11)

His choice of illustration at this point — the effects of the Scottish Reformation — confirm both his continuing sense of Scottishness as declared in the reference to the Glasgow ILP, and his generally 'cultured' stance.

Throughout the pamphlet, the writer's calm reasonableness is established by his constantly suggesting the readers' objections to his case, and by his answering them. 'You will say', 'you may feel', 'you might argue' are rhetorical formulae frequently used in argumentative prose which here serve the double function of contributing to the image of the writer as well as advancing his case. The final and supremely self-confident flourish of the close of the pamphlet, proclaiming his liberalism and denying the notion that he has used any propagandist technique at all, reveals that Muir had perfected the

double-bluff and transformed it into a habit of his writing:

I have offered you a line of policy which seems to me reasonable and humane; it is for you to decide whether or not you can accept it.

Yours sincerely,

Edwin Muir. (SC & LP, p.22)

V 5

The history of Scotland is filled with legendary figures, actual characters on which the popular imagination has worked, making them its own and by doing so transforming them.

Wallace and Bruce, Mary Stuart and Prince Charlie are not so much historical characters as figures in an unwritten ballad: they have taken on an almost purely poetic^{al} reality, and are semi-inventions like Mary Hamilton and the Bonny Earl of Moray, the originals of whom we know to have existed historically but who are now part of a song. (SJ, p.92)

Where Scottish Journey attempts an economic analysis of Scotland, from a contemporary standpoint and without any great depth of historical explanation, Scott and Scotland is in part an attempt to subvert the mythopoeic imagination which Muir felt had dominated awareness of Scotland's past. He aims to provide a history based not on an account of the actions of great figures but on the operation of more general forces in society. The definition of the significance of these forces within the book is, of course, determined by Muir's own ideology, and the notions of centralism prevalent in his work since 1920 are dominant; but the book also serves a further role. The

conclusions Muir reaches through his study constitute the infamous advice that Scots must choose between English and Gaelic culture, and that 'of these two alternatives English is the only practicable one at present' (S&S, p.178): having realised with his novels and Scottish Journey that the Scottish middle-class lacks the strength to revitalise Scottish life as he would wish, he now advises that class to abandon the culture completely.

There is only one theme to Scott and Scotland, and it is the absolute necessity of having a cultural centre within the country itself. Discerning 'a very curious emptiness' behind the apparent wealth of Scott's imagination, he writes:

Men of Scott's enormous genius have rarely Scott's faults; they may have others but not these particular ones; and so I was forced to account for the hiatus in Scott's endowment by considering the environment in which he lived, by invoking the fact — if the reader will agree it is one — that he spent most of his days in a hiatus, in a country, that is to say, which was neither a nation nor a province, and had, instead of a centre, a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it... Scott, in other words, lived in a community which was not a community, and set himself to carry on a tradition which was not a tradition; and the result was that his work was an exact reflection of his predicament. (S&S, p.112)

The appeal to the notion of the writer carrying on a tradition, and being able to function only within the terms of that tradition, is emphasised when he turns to the predicament of the contemporary writer: 'only a people', he writes, 'can create a literature' (S&S, p.14), and armed with this almost mystical sense of the collective unconscious blossoming to consciousness in the individual writer, he concludes that

a Scottish writer who wishes to achieve some approximation to completeness has no choice except to absorb the English tradition and that if he thoroughly does so his work belongs not merely to Scottish literature but to English literature as well. On the other hand, if he wishes to add to an indigenous Scottish literature, and roots himself deliberately in Scotland, he will find there, no matter how long he may search, neither an organic community to round off his conceptions, nor a major literary tradition to support him, nor even a faith among the people themselves that a Scottish literature is possible or desirable, nor any opportunity, finally, of making a livelihood by his work. (S&S, p.15)

In Transition Muir had written of Eliot that

if his criticism is sometimes weighed down by his sense of tradition, it is also enriched and enlightened by it. His great gift as a critic is that of seizing the artistic source and justification of a convention, the necessity in a poem of elements which may appear artificial, the real virtue of a school, the essential law of a work of art. He makes every work live while he considers it, for he sees its articulations, the necessity for them, and their living functioning. Thus, though at times he may appear to be concerned with craftsmanship alone, he is in reality concerned with the organic structure, trying to discover whether it is a living body or merely an agglomeration of parts. (Transition, p.135)

Clearly, the argument of Scott and Scotland is a development of Eliot's notions in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and of his idea of the English seventeenth-century 'dissociation of sensibility' transposed to a Scottish setting: Muir claims that the nature of the Scottish Reformation destroyed the traditions of Scottish literature when it ended the old Catholic sense of community, and that consequently the Scottish writer can never achieve the wholeness which distinguishes

'literature'. Since 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' was published in 1919, the year in which Muir moved to London, joined the New Age circle and met Pound if not Eliot himself, it seems likely that he was aware of Eliot's work from a very early date. But the question of direct influence seems secondary: the comparison between 'Our Generation' and the Criterion 'Commentaries' shows the degree to which they shared in the general ethos of the literary London of the early 1920s, and the more interesting point seems to be the degree of Muir's allegiance to that frame of critical vision. Scott and Scotland can be seen not as a betrayal of the principles of the Renaissance but, more importantly, as the response to his own position as determined by the earlier influences on his literary career. In a time of crisis both for Scotland and for Europe (and for his own career), the dominating elements of his very mixed ideology prove to be those deriving from his days of opportunity in London, as he notes by referring 'finally' to the impossibility of the Scottish writer 'making a livelihood by his work'. Scott and Scotland has been interpreted as Muir's betrayal of Scotland: it was, rather, his attempt to understand what seemed to be Scotland's betrayal of him, and the oversimplifications of his conclusions themselves reflect the depth and persistence of the consequences which followed that early failure.

Muir writes here in the first person again, and although this is an academic study, traces of the characteristics of his persona are apparent. The technique in this case does not involve the use of memory as in the other books of the period, but the style of sentence construction matches that developed from the days of 'Edward Moore' in several respects. There are, for example, comparatively few

subordinate clauses: rather, he writes with long, simply connected structures, giving the impression of piling up more and more evidence for his case. The simple declaratives suggest a plain analysis of the situation as written by a trustworthy man responding to the unambiguous facts of the case, and combined with moments of detectable impatience and frustration at the state of affairs before his remedies are applied, are as strongly reminiscent of the tone of 'Our Generation' as they are similar to the quality of Scottish Journey.

As an academic study, this book need not have been written in the first person at all: that Muir chose to write it through a persona shows the depth of his involvement in the subject and the continuation of his propagandist drive through a technique grown inseparable from his writing.

Chapter VI :

The Autobiographies, 1940 - 1954

1939	Last 'conversion' to Christianity	
1940		<u>The Story and the Fable</u>
1942	To Edinburgh	
1943		<u>The Narrow Place</u>
1945	To Prague	
1946		<u>The Voyage</u>
1948	To Britain	
1949	To Rome	<u>The Labyrinth</u>
		<u>Essays on Literature and</u> <u>Society</u>
1950	To Newbattle	
1952		<u>Collected Poems, 1921-1951</u>
1954		<u>An Autobiography</u>

VI 1

Someone like myself who remembers comparatively little of his early childhood approaches childhood memories with some suspicion, but Muir's account of his life on Wyre in the first chapter of his Autobiography soon sweeps away all doubts.

(M & P, p.1)

After transcendental Christianity becomes the dominant element of Muir's ideology in 1939, works arising from aspects of his identity incompatible with that religious commitment are discredited through their treatment in his autobiography. His success in persuading the critics to accept his priorities depends upon the facility with which Muir proves able to synthesise in this work the major elements of his writing; and indeed, an autobiography might almost have been predicted to be the most suitable genre for Muir's skills.

On one level, the form provided an opportunity to rewrite history so as to explain the present state of the country through his own past further to Scott and Scotland, while running less risk of summoning the kind of public disagreement that study had invoked by dealing with apparently isolatedly personal material. Simultaneously, autobiography's conventional demand for writing in the first person singular constituted the most sustained challenge to his long-practised use of a persona, testing to the limit the success of his literary training and practice. Moreover, in composing the story of his own life Muir could again attempt to satisfy his desire to construct a narrative, to create an image of progression towards harmony that would describe and embody his own political and philosophical resolutions in a literary form seeming to

reconcile major concerns of his professional career.

That Muir can only achieve compromise between the conflicts continuing within his ideology, failing to find a solution for them beyond the evasion of his transcendentalism, is shown by the way in which he adapts this theme of narrative (and its concomitant difficulties in the post-modernist period) to a major strand of his religious belief. Referring to the precedence accorded to his dreams in the autobiography Muir writes:

I could follow these images freely if I were writing an autobiographical novel. As it is, I have to stick to the facts and try to fit them in where they will fit in. (Auto, p.48)

This notion of the novel offering unrestricted freedom for the following of 'images' suggests an implicit reference to modernist examples of the form such as Ulysses and Annals of the Five Senses. Muir seems finally to be conceding the continued attraction of modernist technique with which he had been contending since the composition of Transition, hinting that if he were to attempt an autobiographical fiction it would naturally fall into such a form; yet the autobiography he does choose to write is the most conventionally plotted and patterned of all his writings,¹ and it follows images only in order to construct from them a system of values within which he seeks to confine all judgement of his works.

Simultaneously, of course, this passage also contributes to the impression given to the reader of the autobiographical persona, a device

1. As early as 1928, Muir argues the relation of pattern and narrative, saying that 'to remember the novel the first thing one must do is to assume (that is, forget) such things as that it is about life and that life has a pattern'. (The Structure of the Novel, p.10)

still relying heavily on 'Edward Moore's' claim to be a plain man working empirically with facts and without prejudice. Yet the sense of amateurism which accompanies this denial of ideological intention is belied by an article on the composition of The Story and the Fable which appeared shortly after its publication and in which Muir emphasises his conscientiousness as a writer and his theory of a transcendental order imperceptible in this world.² He states that in composing the book.

I tried to make clear the pattern of my life as a human being existing in space and moving through time, environed by mystery. After I had finished I went over the manuscript many times, seeking to make the pattern clearer, and felt like a man with an inefficient torch stumbling through a labyrinth, having forgotten where he had entered and not knowing where he would come out. (C837a)

Here, the concession that the autobiography is a deliberate literary creation, a manuscript actively worked over many times to stress 'the pattern', is defused by having him only act comparatively, to 'make the pattern clearer' suggesting that it has an independent existence; and it is quite outweighed by the image of the stumbling, forgetful persona's transposed inefficiency. The reader's attention is directed away from the process of the writing and towards the progress of the persona, the innocent 'environed by mystery' bravely coping with the 'labyrinth'. Such vocabulary is typical of the later Muir persona and is the instrument he uses to propagandise in the interests of his late ideology. 'Environed', for example, implies that being surrounded by 'mystery' is the natural habitat of man and therefore discourages attempts

2. 'Yesterday's Mirror: Afterthoughts to an Autobiography' (C837a).

to extend the intellect, so becoming a politically conservative force by opposing the changes of development; and the reference to the labyrinth depends upon and appeals to the classical bias in the education of the middle and upper classes (especially of those who had been through the English public school system), flattering and fostering their 'elitist' view of 'culture'. The language extends the transcendentalism beyond its explicit discussion, each sentence becoming a move towards persuading the reader to regard its pattern as the natural and exclusive mode for the understanding not of Muir's account of his experience, but of that experience itself — and indeed, since he claims the right to interpret not only what he had felt but 'what we all feel' (Auto, p.25), of every human life. The terms of that interpretation are set out quite immediately in 'Yesterday's Mirror' when he claims authority for his principles on the grounds that

our knowledge of life[is]significant only if we read into the pattern of our own past the universal pattern of human existence (p.405);

yet the impulse towards the interweaving of the writing persona with a narrating stance, a move that characterises the autobiography, can be seen to be irresistible even in this short piece, rendering it an intensified example of the method on which it purports to be a critical commentary. Such scrutiny as a theoretical article might be expected to direct towards the form of autobiography implies a self-consciousness incompatible with the persona's assumed simplicity and directness, and the degeneration of this essay into anecdote serves to distance such expectations from the narrative voice which is employed. Meanwhile, Christian dogma and the political quietism with which it is aligned in

Muir's ideology are both encapsulated in the assertion here that there is 'an indefeasible rightness beneath the wrongness of things'; but he goes further in drawing his illustrations of this good and evil from childhood experiences such as are familiar from the autobiography and turning them into small stories in their own right, to be judged aesthetically as such. The morality of a child's rhyme, for example, is identified with that of The Brothers Karamazov, thereby not only suggesting a literary model for the appreciation of the subject matter, but also flattering the audience by the persona's expectations that its members are as well read as he is. More daringly, Muir turns from this to tell the story of his 'first knowledge of death', claiming that it arose from the occasion of a neighbouring farmer's son coming home to Orkney 'from Leith or Aberdeen' to die. Again, a reference to War and Peace in describing the young man's demeanour suggests a narrative framework; but in this instance the entire anecdote is structured according to a literary model. The elements of the piece — a young man returning to the countryside of his childhood from some unspecified but distinctly Scottish city where he has been contaminated by disease — leads to a sentimental description of the scenery during the funeral:

The men advanced slowly along the white road in the sunshine until they disappeared over the brow of a little hill. The fields looked quieter than usual, and an intense peace lay over them. The distant group of men was the centre of that peace, and when they sank over the edge of the hill they took with them the fear I had had as I walked by the cart. (p.410)

The features stressed here — the innocently 'white' road, the sunshine, the littleness of the hill, the intense peace, the removal of fear and

and the acceptance of death as belonging to an incomprehensible but absolute order — combine with the events of the story to turn the piece from a critical essay into an exercise in the ethos of Scottish kailyard fiction,³ adopting entirely the image and interpretation of experience typical of that school's reliance on the simplistic and conservative dichotomy between the good countryside — healthy, communal, moral and fixed — and the evil city — individualistic, sickening, immoral and transitory.

Both these techniques feature in the autobiography itself. The impulse to fictionalise is apparent in the Bildungsroman model discernible in the development of the persona from birth to the maturity signalled by his Christian resolution, and it is taken almost to the point of self-parody in the fourth chapter when Muir reprints 'an imaginary impression of my life in the bone factory' written a few years after leaving 'Fairport' and using a persona of whom the autobiographical narrator claims that

the 'he' is, of course, myself, and was a device by which I tried, without success, to see my life objectively (Auto, p.136)

— an attempt now held to be the explicit purpose of the autobiography itself.

Reference to 'Fairport', the pseudonym Muir assigns to Greenock,⁴ reveals his need to fictionalise on even so insignificant a level as the names of the places which mark the split between country and city in

3. The motif of youth blighted by acquaintance with the corrupting forces of the modern world appears, for example, in 'Ian Maclaren's' Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush (1894) and Days of Auld Langsyne (1895), and its typicality is emphasised by the stress on the pattern in George Douglas Brown's The House with the Green Shutters (1901).

4. Letters, p.14.

the larger work, the conventional, pastoral, romantic classification which becomes the structural principle of the book, albeit in a more sophisticated manner. For example, although Prague is held to be an instance of a city preserving the communal properties of a rural world on his first visit in the 1920s (and by extension marks the failure of that optimism on his return to the post-war capital subjected to the Communist putsch), the progression of the autobiography through chapters entitled 'Wyre', 'Garth', 'Glasgow', 'Fairport', 'London' and so on traces a journey away from what is held to be optimum condition of Orkney.

While the autobiographical strategies applied to succeeding phases of his career in order to foster this impression of corruption have been discussed in their place, to neglect these chapters dealing with his early life would be to underestimate the grand scale of the work's conception and the precision and skill of its execution. Although there is no independent textual evidence from this pre-literary period against which to measure Muir's account of his childhood, the techniques by which he has been observed to promote and propagandise his religious beliefs at the expense of his secular concerns are equally apparent in the opening and in the later sections of the book. By giving an account of their ideological shaping, it is possible to counteract their ability to induce the naïve assent of Butter's comment, and further, to explain such 'critical' enthusiasm by revealing the method employed in the initial section where, least vulnerable to immediate challenge. Muir established the markers of value that form the ideological framework of the whole book. The autobiography works by a principle that is analogous to the method governing the reading of his poetry as described by

Ritchie Robertson: the audience is, he says, required

to internalize a relational pattern as the langue which enables the actual poems to be understood as its parole.⁵

Here Muir sets up a system so quietly that by the time the reader comes to the first explicit avowal of transcendentalist faith, deep inside the long first chapter, his principles have come to seem naturally just and completely acceptable. The starkness of a statement such as that 'human beings are understandable only as immortal spirits' (Auto, p.51) is concealed by its conforming to the standards established in the account of life on Orkney. And typically, it is quickly followed by a further declaration of the persona's inability to propagandise:

I do not have the power to prove that man is immortal and that the soul exists; but I know that there must be such a proof, and that compared with it every other demonstration is idle.

(Auto, p.51)

This appeal to a transcending faith does not ask the validation of an external authority, but is the completion of a mutually justificatory synthesis which attempts to seal the text from dissenting criticism. Firmly embedded within an account of Muir's early life which is presented entirely within the terms of the value system emanating from his religious priorities, it completes that description as its element of intellectual self-consciousness, while itself being made secure by the experiential evidence which these chapters are made to provide.

The autobiography, then, is not the investigative exercise which it was suggested to be. After 1939, Muir could not step outside his religious

5. R.N.N. Robertson, 'Edwin Muir's contact with German Literature and its influence on his Thought and Poetry' (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1981), p.344.

commitment in order to examine it, but necessarily and consistently wrote from within it; and consequently the notion of there being an independent, objective pattern to which Muir 'fits' his own experience as best he can must be seen not as an account of his progress towards the theory of the story and the fable, but as an instance of its operation.

The values which structure this pattern are advocated individually in the implications of virtually every sentence; but the strength of the autobiography is increased by their also being developed into a system that marks each episode for the guidance of the audience, explicit or implicit associations coming to function as emblems of the author's approval and disapproval.

The most consistent element of this system is religion, used with varying degrees of emphasis but remaining the central touchstone. St Magnus's Cathedral, for example, is said to be 'the most beautiful thing within sight' of the Bu (Auto, p.16), but this simple description is turned to a propagandist point when Muir adds that 'it rose every day against the sky until it seemed to become a sign of the fable in our lives' (p.16), anachronistically attributing to his childhood and to the family in general an interpretation dependent upon his own adult opinion. Although he claims to remember nothing of the routine of his first seven years (p.19), his first definite memory is of being baptized (p.18): since the very concept of the autobiography depends on the persona's selection from Muir's memories, this accords the ceremony a special prestige. Family prayers on a Sunday are said to be among his 'happiest memories': echoing Scott and Scotland's location of unified sensibility in the pre-Reformation period, these occasions are

said to have provided 'a feeling of complete security and union among us as we sat reading about David or Elijah' (p.26). Organised religion however does not meet with his full approval: his participation in the revivalist meetings on Orkney at the turn of the century is described as the result of childhood fears of exclusion, 'the only act which would make me one with my family again' (p.85), in order to enhance the private form of his own later spirituality; and the cumulative and systematic nature of the book's method is illustrated when the dislike of group worship established here is used to cast his later socialism in Glasgow into dísrepute: 'my conversion to Socialism', he needs only say, 'was a recapitulation of my first conversion at fourteen' (p.113).

The political activism of his time in Glasgow is attacked in its own right: committed speakers at meetings of the Clarion Scouts are portrayed as self-seeking cranks, for example (p.112), and engagement is implicitly denigrated by being contrasted with the political quietism of Orkney. The landlord whose exactions there drove the family from successive farms (p.66) is discussed only in the context of his shooting trip to the island, and the terms of that description -- 'a mere picture' (p.15) -- insist that Muir felt no anger with the General, suggesting that his role in the capitalist system is on a par with that as a hunter of game birds in which it is symbolised: that it may not be particularly pleasant is conceded, but that it belongs to the larger pattern transcending apparent evil enables it to go unquestioned.

There is a further emblematic distinction in Muir's contrasting the prevalent attitude to beggars in Orkney with that in Glasgow. In the islands men such as John Simpson -- regarded, almost as if they were 'blessed fools', as being 'not right in the mind' -- are 'always taken in and given food' (p.82); yet one of the first things the reader

is told about the adjustment to city life is that

beggars were perpetually ringing the bell, and we did not learn for weeks that you must not take a beggar in and give him something to eat, but must slam the door at once in his face. (p.91)

Glasgow is cast throughout as the antithesis of Orkney, presaged by bad omens such as his father's cold, the dark and windy day of the travel and the dirty train awaiting the family on the mainland (p.90). Leading into the 'chaos' (p.90) of family deaths, personal illness and the degradations of the bone factory, it becomes an allegorical image matching the rural idyll in which the hardships of farming poor land were conveniently rushed over (p.66).

Another aspect of this romanticism is the reiterated preference for the unconscious over the conscious mind whenever possible. Childhood, for example, is the ideal: then, it is claimed, 'a child has this vision, in which there is a completer harmony of all things with each other than he will ever know again' (p.33). The notion that the status quo represents 'order' (p.19) (and that this is lost as the child becomes conscious, Muir being said to have hated school in true Wordsworthian and Rousseauesque fashion because it shut him off from nature (p.41)) reveals the conservatism inherent in Muir's use of this formulation.

Dreams are recorded whenever possible, not because of the influence of his Jungian psychoanalysis, but because 'I should like to save from the miscellaneous dross of experience a few glints of immortality' (p.54): again, the value system is reinforced by this linking of the unconscious

with faith in transcendental religion.

This ability to synthesise elements and emblems is perhaps most apparent when the autobiography makes links between Muir's poetry and the experiences of this period. By giving the dreams or anecdotes which provided images for some of his poems — most notably 'The Horses' (p.22), 'The Little General' (p.15), 'The Ballad of Hector in Hades' (p.42) and 'The Combat' (p.65, p.106-7) — he associates childhood, imagination and art within the context of his first mystical intuitions. 'The Horses', for example, is based on farm animals which are said to have invoked a feeling of 'worship in the Old Testament sense' (p.22). The unconscious is also linked to this grouping by extension: poetry is said to arrive spontaneously, rising out of his subconscious like dreams or forgotten memories (as with the sailor suit and wooden whistle, for example (p.19)) and being written down 'almost complete, at one sitting' (p.43). And again, this synthesis feeds another element of the ideology. At each stage in his development, Muir's reading is listed and attention directed to the manner in which it is said to have affected him; for example, the earliest readings of the Millennial speculations in The Christian Herald, are held to have sunk deep into his mind (p.28), while the volumes of bound literary periodicals read in Glaswegian municipal libraries are said to have absorbed the sweat of their unwashed readers 'like a solution of misery' (p.96). But the body of poetry held in greatest esteem is the ballads. Imaged as spontaneous imaginative emanations from the collective unconscious of the Catholic community of peasants, they become an emblem of the desired organisation of human life and they gain an added kudos from having been 'handed down orally for hundreds of years' (p.30), carrying the concept

of tradition to the child Muir in Orkney: 'no autobiography can begin with a man's birth' he argues (p.48). The growth of this symbol from his essay in The Freeman through his own experiments with the ballad form and on to its key role in The Estate of Poetry⁶ reflects Muir's ability to play variations on a theme so well moulded to his ideological system, never stepping outside it to consider the restrictions placed upon members of a society so highly valuing orthodoxy, never admitting the possibility of opposition to his own ideals.

In discussing his childhood Muir comments:

we construct little by little with the approval of all the world, the mask we shall wear with such ease when we reach manhood. (p.67)

'Little by little' is this opening section of his autobiography Muir creates an ideological system which sits 'with such ease' on the material presented by his literary persona, his 'mask', in order to win 'the approval of all the world', that only by remembering that the system is as consciously constructed as the mask does it become possible to appreciate the extent and the subtlety of Muir's literary ability — and the dangers of the propagandist use to which he learned to devote them.

6. In 1956 the Bollingen Foundation awarded Muir a grant for three years study of the Ballads. Willa took over this project after his death and wrote Living With Ballads (1965).

Although Muir's ideology underwent no major revision after 1939, it did continue to develop, and the differences between the two published versions of his life, The Story and the Fable published in 1940 and An Autobiography which appeared in 1954, show a distinct movement over the intervening fourteen years towards a deeper distrust of the remnants of his early political idealism and a greater confidence in his handling of tone and persona as propagandist devices against them.⁷

Some of the alterations are, of course, simply a matter of bringing facts up to date. For example, the death of his sister Elizabeth leads him to change the single paragraph that refers to his relationship with her and Clara, omitting after his assertion that she had 'an eager mind and a spirit equal to anything' the phrase 'and still has', and amending 'she died some years ago' (of Clara) to 'both are now dead' (p.94/p.80⁸). Even if the occasional failure to spot the need for such a change⁹ is included in this category, it remains so small a grouping as merely to witness further the general bias of the autobiographies away from the details of everyday life.

More interesting are those changes which relate to the dominant areas of conflict within his ideology (notably, again, concerning his socialism and his Scottishness) and those which reflect his response to that conflict in the creation of a literary persona; and in each of

7. There seems to be no evidence of editorial influence on either version of the autobiography, and indeed, Muir's comments on struggling with revisions (see below) suggest that the text was fashioned by him alone.

8. Comparative page references are given in chronological order.

9. J.C. Maxwell, 'Edwin Muir's An Autobiography: An Error in Revision', Scottish Literature Review VIII (March 1966), p.101, records such a slip.

these cases, Muir can be seen to be reinforcing his transcendentalism.

Muir wrote The Story and the Fable around the time of his religious conversion of 1939, and so it is not surprising that it should carry vestigial traces of the socialist interpretation of society which he had been expounding — albeit in the version diluted for middle-class taste implicit in Social Credit philosophy — as recently as 1935. The changes Muir makes to passages that reveal this socialist background show a development of the persona of The Story and the Fable into a character for whom, in An Autobiography, even the remnants of such a concern are too narrow, too confining and too much concerned with temporal reality. For example, in discussing the differing types of 'distortion' caused in what he sees as some essential kind of human nature by the necessity to specialise in a single job or career, he wrote in the first case:

These things are of enormous importance, and we shall never settle them until the miner can live a civilized life and the stockbroker has disappeared (p.57).

Echoes of the concept of class war, with the ultimate victory of the proletarian over the bourgeois class, are resolutely stripped from this sentence in the 1954 version:

These things are of enormous importance, and we shall never settle them until the miner and the stockbroker live a civilized life (p.51).

Similarly, in condemning the conditions in which he lived just beyond the slums of Glasgow, Muir first makes specific attacks on those who have become complacent about their social origins since they managed to escape from them: 'successful business-men and Labour leaders who wear

their youth as if they were flaunting a dingy decoration' clearly worry the old member of the I.L.P., as is shown by his naming them again ('Members of Parliament or business magnates or trade-union leaders') within the same paragraph (p.129). This attack is turned into a mere general observation in An Autobiography when he complains of any 'successful men' (p.110), so reducing the sense of the precise phenomenon of social climbing diluting class awareness and political idealism which informs the earlier paragraph, and which must have been embarrassing for the cultivatedly apolitical and successful writer of 1954. He actually goes further at the end of this section by inserting a new sentence which convicts him of a complacency perhaps different in kind but nonetheless arising from the same causes and equivalent in significance to that which he had condemned: to conclude this section with the observation that

There has been a great improvement in the lot of the poor since the time I am speaking of, and that is one of the entirely good achievements of the century (p.110)

implies that all is now well and political activity no longer carries any humanistic justification.

Again, in the account Muir gives of his stay in Prague in the early 1920s, he initially devotes a paragraph to the destruction of the communal, organic life he sensed in Czechoslovakia by the Nazi invasion:

Karel Čapek died shortly after the seizure of his country by Germany, whether of his illness or of a broken heart I do not know. After the Prague in which he was 'Karlicku' to everyone and where he could walk about as he liked, the new Prague must have seemed a prison-yard. We met many other Czech writers. I dread to think what may have happened to them now:

even if no physical harm has come to them their life has been snatched away, and their Prague no longer exists. We spent many evenings in their houses; we were taken into their lives. We had no premonition then that history, in Oswald Spengler's words, 'would take them by the throat and do with them what must be done'. The idea of history taking people by the throat pleased Spengler. (p.229)

By omitting this section from An Autobiography (p.189), Muir implies that the only danger to the social life of Prague came from the later repression of the Communist regime. Actively to have decided to cut from the text his earlier condemnation of Fascist repression implies, at least, that by 1954 he had an unbalanced view of political reality, and regarded repression inspired by right-wing convictions as being less contemptible than that resulting from left-wing dogmas. While the Communist take-over which he had witnessed when working for the British Council must have been more vivid in his mind in 1954, this excision reveals, if nothing more, a propagandist thrust out of keeping with the notion of the apolitical but vaguely and generally compassionate persona.

There is a further set of such political examples to be noted in the final section of The Story and the Fable, 'Extracts from a Diary, 1937-39'. The omission of these pieces from the revised version of the book was obviously caused by the restructuring of the work; yet it remains pertinent to state that cutting these passages altogether rather than working them into the new pattern changes the overall effect of the writing, and helps constitute the different tones of the earlier and later autobiographies. The most noticeable passages of the 'Extracts' include that asking since 'the rich live on the poor: why should they sneer at them as well?' (p.242), and that defining Nazi

imperialism in Czechoslovakia as the inevitable extension of nineteenth century materialism, industrialism and ideals of progress (p.257).

References to the problematical status of Scotland and his own Scottishness are less numerous than political observations, possibly because the quarrel over Scott and Scotland was barely three years old in 1939. However, there are two significant alterations to pieces dealing with the idea of Scottish Nationalism. The first is at the conclusion of his description of the organic community he discerned in Prague; in 1939 he wrote admiringly of Čapek's popularity with all sections of the population:

This warm, easygoing contact could only have been possible in a comparatively small town, and it was the first thing that made me wish that Edinburgh might become a similar place and that Scotland might be a nation again. (p.228)

The 1954 version of this section ends with the hope 'that Edinburgh might become a similar place' (p.189), and the question of how that result might be achieved is completely ignored and so divorced from nationalism. The second consideration of Nationalism falls into the category of observations noted in the diary extracts and dropped from An Autobiography: arguing against imperialism on the grounds that 'mankind has never managed to do anything as it should be done' because of the impossibility of achieving full knowledge of all circumstances from within the temporal world, he continues:

because of this I believe that men are capable of organising themselves only in relatively small communities, and that even then they need custom, tradition and memory to guide them. For these reasons I believe in Scottish Nationalism, and should like to see Scotland a self-governing nation. In great empires the quality of individual life declines: it becomes plain and

commonplace. The little tribal community of Israel, the little city state of Athens, the relatively small England of Elizabeth's time, mean far more in the history of civilization than the British Empire. I am for small nations as against large ones, because I am for a kind of society where men have some real practical control of their lives. I am for a Scottish nation, because I am a Scotsman. (p.260)

Again, it seems likely that this passage was originally intended as a reply to MacDiarmid's contemporary attacks on Scott and Scotland; albeit implicitly, it certainly ridicules the insistence of the critics that Muir never responded to MacDiarmid's invective, even if only by showing his continuing confusion on the subject. While the Eliotesque cast of thought here is perfectly in keeping with the notion of the small organic community which An Autobiography propagandises, Muir chooses to excise its specific application to his own background from the later text, so reducing the political aspects of his philosophy and furthering the notion of an apolitical persona.

The image of the persona is also strengthened in An Autobiography by modifications to the earlier text. Hollander, for instance, points out that every reference to 'Time' in The Story and the Fable is rewritten with a lower case initial in An Autobiography (Bibliographical Study, p.16), showing a greater confidence in the persona's ability to carry the audiences' opinion without striking postures which draw attention to their ideological determinants. Other changes reflect more particular instances of increased conservatism on the part of the older Muir. For example, in writing of the rise from the slums of successful business men and Labour leaders, he had originally felt it necessary to deny that he himself shared any such ambition:

I have never had any social ambition, nor do I have any literary ambition beyond the wish to write well; I am not much concerned whether I have or lack a reputation. To be a Member of Parliament would not excite me, and if I were one I should not look back on my youth in self-approval and think that I had done a great thing by rising from fourteen shillings a week to six hundred pounds a year. (p.129-130)

Contemporary letters showing Muir's keenness to make a mark in the literary world (even a column... done regularly and conscientiously should awaken a little respect. And it is only a beginning'; 'I want particularly to be published and recognised in some form or other in England'; 'I want primarily to get some kind of hearing in England'¹⁰) show this to be in part a device towards the creation of the image of the open, honest persona; but its omission from An Autobiography (p.110) shows a greater degree of subtlety — if not of embarrassment — than fourteen years before, and a greater confidence in his powers to convince his readers by implying rather than stating the other-worldly concerns of the persona, and his remoteness from such trivial matters.

Again, in his account of his friendship with John Holms, he cuts almost a full page (p.213/p.178) that refers to their shared love of debate. This may have been because he was embarrassed by once having argued that had he been Christ he would not have consented to be crucified for the sake of mankind, since this denotes an interest in doctrine that doesn't quite fit with the non-sectarian Christianity of the persona; or it may have been because it referred, in passing, to Willa's having been occasionally impatient of the entire friendship,¹¹ and the notion of domestic disharmony

11. E.M. - Schiff: 1.9.24, NLS MS 19671, ff47-50 (48),
2.3.24, NLS MS 19671, ff37-9 (37),
16.9.24, NLS MS 19671 ff51-3 (51).

12. See Belonging, p.126ff.

was equally inappropriate. The general effect of the excision is to increase the sense of Muir sitting in judgement on his friend, and finding him, like Mitrinović and Orage and the political discussion group in St Andrews, to fall short of the serious transcendentalism he has himself since espoused.

If most of the changes charted here show the greater confidence and subtlety of An Autobiography over The Story and the Fable, there is one case which reveals a greater degree of caution to have been a further characteristic of the later Muir. Having quoted an excerpt from 'Impressions of Prague' (C124, C133, C139) he comments:

These reflections were set down when my impressions of Prague were fresh; they were sincere, on the whole, though romantically touched up. (p.226)

All that follows the semi-colon here is omitted from An Autobiography (p.187): to admit that he was a professional writer, that he did not always remain more than 'on the whole' sincere, and that he was capable of literary manipulation as shown by his having 'touched up' what purported to be direct recording of autobiographical fact, was too near to admitting doubt of his current practice in the Autobiography to be allowed to stand. Incompatible with the image of the artless writer, its inclusion was an unnecessary risk that Muir later chose not to run.

As well as being explicable in terms of a strengthening of the persona, this single hint of a failure of nerve is, of course, far outweighed by the structural development of An Autobiography. The Story and the Fable ends with 'Extracts from a Diary'; of Muir's two 'Scottish' novels, The Three Brothers concludes with excerpts from David Blackadder's journal, and Poor Tom with a direct record of Mansie Manson's reflections after Tom's

funeral, presented through a technique approximating to a dilute version of 'stream of consciousness'. This parallel signifies the shared fictive nature of these works. The sense of open-endedness in The Story and the Fable is an illusion worked by the form, since the final section is an unflinching exposition of Muir's faith in the order of the 'medieval communal feeling', and, following from its impossibility in the modern world ('I do not think there is anything admirable in being up to date, apart from the fact that it is necessary', p.263), his implicit transcendentalism. An Autobiography, on the other hand, is more conventionally formed, with no pretence at any openness of ending: here Muir, having asserted 'I cannot bring life into a neat pattern' (p.280), has the confidence to bring his book, which in terms of the literary artifact precisely and only constitutes his 'life', to a perfectly neat ending with all the satisfaction of a completed pattern of development. And here the Christianity is explicitly avowed:

As I look back on the part of the mystery which is my own life, my own fable, what I am most aware of is that we receive more than we can ever give; we receive it from the past, on which we draw with every breath, but also — and this is a point of faith — from the Source of the mystery itself, by the means which religious people call Grace. (p.281)

Emphasising the personal again and again ('I look back', 'my own life', 'I am most aware'), yet talking in the plural ('we receive', 'we can ever give', 'we draw'), he creates a balance that suggests the image of an impartial writer unwilling to foist his opinion on the reader while constantly impressing upon him the need to do so; and by suggesting that the term 'Grace' is one he cannot bring himself to use, let alone adopt, he implies an entirely undogmatic faith that is held with all the

absoluteness of any theologian. Such techniques show Muir to have developed between 1940 and 1954 a surer conviction of his own ideas, a stronger confidence in his ability to propagandise them through his autobiography, and a certain willingness to delineate through those techniques and in those works the ideological context in which his poetry was to be read.

Chapter VII:

The Poetry, 1925-1960

- 1925 First Poems
- 1926 Chorus of the Newly Dead
- 1932 Six Poems
- 1934 Variations on a Time Theme
- 1937 Journeys and Places
- 1943 The Narrow Place
- 1946 The Voyage and Other Poems
- 1949 The Labyrinth
- 1952 Collected Poems 1921-1951
- 1954 Prometheus
- 1956 One Foot in Eden
- 1960 Collected Poems 1921-1958

VII 1

Although to demonstrate too keen an interest in any sector of his literary career would have been to risk compromising his avowed commitment to transcendentalism, Muir employs an autobiographical strategy which has been shown to be consistently directing the reader's attention from his prose to his poetry. His political journalism and critical essays, his reviews and novels, his political and cultural investigations: all these are in turn either ignored or disparaged in order to throw emphasis upon the contemporaneous poetry which is discussed at much greater length and in terms of positive value. Occasionally, this process is carried to the very limits of logical restraint: for example, the concluding comment to the account of his early years not only stresses again the centrality of the poetry, but goes further by suggesting that the influence of his first literary training with The New Age ran counter to — and delayed — his 'true' development. 'I was thirty-five then', he writes,

and passing through a stage which, if things had been different, I should have reached ten years earlier. I have felt that handicap ever since. I began to write poetry at thirty-five instead of at twenty-five or twenty. (Auto, p.193)

Even the tolerance for this passage invoked by the suspicion that it is an exaggeration constructed to provide dramatic (albeit slightly pathetic) flourish with which to close the chapter cannot compensate for the sense of excessive paradox in the claim that non-existent, potential poetry is more significant than the writing which was published.

While the autobiography attempts to assert that this prose work was merely the superficial product by which Muir earned money with which

to buy time for his poetry and pays little attention to its aims, its success or its manner of composition, it also makes considerable efforts to place the poetry as an essential component of 'Muir's' personality and a clear reflection of his Christian-transcendentalist ideology.¹ For example, the romantic notion that poetry is spontaneously produced by the mysteriously hidden operations of the subconscious mind is used to align this area of his writing with other markers established in the autobiography as signifying elevated positives in Muir's hierarchy, such as childhood and rural (preferably Orcadian) life. It is suggested that poems retain and represent some state of pre-ideological innocence because they are said to 'emerge' (Auto, p.246) from a pre-political level of the human psyche on their own initiative. Of the 'Ballad of Hector in Hades', for instance, the claim is that it 'came to me quite spontaneously; I wrote the poem down, almost complete, at one sitting' (Auto, p.43). Poetry is further distanced from the distrusted processes of conscious thought and the image of writing being something deliberately worked upon, shaped and fashioned, by the notion that it is so pure(ly) a subliminal product that it can 'emerge' only when the poet is not too preoccupied with the affairs of this world to be able, as it were, to listen out for it. Of the years in St Andrews, for example, to which he concedes a stronger (although misdirected) interest in politics than almost any other period, the narrator also notes: 'I wrote very little poetry' (Auto, p.245). The point is made more explicitly when reference is made to the attempted writings in Hellenau which, dropping the verse composed for The New Age, are held to be the first poetry:

1. On only one occasion does Muir concede an interest in the worldly fate of his poetry as consequent upon the reviews it received: and that instance is cast as a mere curiosity. He concludes the account of his dream about an increasingly hostile reviewer-turned-horse with the comment that it was 'a comic image of a fanciful fear'. (Auto, p.240).

I had no training; I was too old to submit myself to contemporary influences; and I had acquired in Scotland a deference towards ideas which made my entrance into poetry difficult. Though my imagination had begun to work I had no technique by which I could give expression to it. There were the rhythms of English poetry on the one hand, the images of my mind on the other. All I could do at the start was to force the one, creaking and complaining, into the ^{mould of} other. (Auto, p.205)

Simply by admitting the consideration of technique at this point, the autobiography — however surprisingly in relation to its other assertions about the spontaneous nature of poetry — attributes more importance to the verse than the prose, by virtue of widening the scope of the attention it receives. Yet such is Muir's skill that this sense of paradox does not become intrusive, and does not prevent him from using even this passage to reinforce his own separation of values. He begins by claiming to have had 'no training' because he had received no instruction in the composition of poetry, so distancing this area of his work still further from the very thorough instruction he had taken while becoming a highly efficient propagandist in prose under Orage's tutelage. He isolates himself from 'contemporary influences' to defend the purity of his imagination and to suggest, however implausibly, that in the years while he was preparing the essays for Transition he was unaffected in his own writing by the modernist ethos he was analysing, again pushing poetry away from the deliberations of his critical faculties. And the same estranging movement is apparent, with an oddly anti-Scottish twist, in the separation of 'Scottish ideas' from 'the English poetic tradition', as if poetry and ideas were quite incompatible — and as if he had become reconciled to precisely the dissociation he had attacked in

Scott and Scotland. Muir seems determined that the reader should not suspect his own poetry of carrying Scottish ideas — or any other sort, for that matter, lest they reveal its conceptual content. Indeed, the English poetic tradition is not aligned here with any Eliotesque images of the hard intellectual struggles of the apprentice poet, being referred to only as 'the rhythms' of English poetry, as if their adoption were able to be some kind of purely technical matter carrying no implications of wider cultural or political issues and no hint of rejecting a distinctive Scottish tradition. Moreover, by making distance in time ('I was too old') rather than geographical or social distance from the English cultural centre the cause of his difficulties he further depoliticises the nature of the choices made at this time and the motives behind their determination; and, since problems of time are alone irresolvable, he adds to the pessimistic impulsion towards transcendentalism which permeates the autobiography.

This claim to technical incompetence sits comfortably with the autobiographical persona's image of 'Muir' as the plain, unsophisticated writer naively recording the empirical truth of his experience whenever and in whatever mode he writes. But the autobiography is attempting more than the reinforcement of its own narrative stance in its treatment of the poetry. In providing an interpretation of the verse as a reflection of the trans^cendentalist ideology which the autobiography avows, the book seeks not only to lend the poetic precedence over all his other writings, but also to make its own values and philosophy, understood only from within its own terms, govern the reading of the poetry while disguising the propagandist intention of the alliance. So adept is Muir in this exercising of this literary manipulation that

Butter feels compelled to comment precisely that

propaganda is an expression of the will, poetry of the imagination; so he did not think propagandist poetry possible. (M&P, p.143)

To divide 'will' and 'imagination' in this manner -- as if the limits of the will were not set by the boundaries of the imagination, and the terms of the imagination went unaffected by the choices of the will -- shows how completely Butter adopts Muir's separation of the rational and the intuitive, the intellectual and the emotional, and reveals the success of the very propaganda whose existence he denies.

Yet ironically, once the extent of Muir's desire to persuade has been recognised and his transcendentalist values eschewed, the autobiography still functions, from a wider perspective outwith his ideology, as an index to his aesthetic. It holds within itself not only his attempts to determine one reading of the poetry, but also sufficient evidence to suggest the basis of another.

Muir's own interpretation is facilitated by his seeming largely to have devoted his poetry to an exploration of the religious aspect of his thought which was eventually to dominate his ideology. Read achronologically -- and especially if read in the volume of Collected Poems edited by John Hall with Willa Muir's help² -- the poetry reveals a system of images, of symbols and Leitmotifs, which creates an imaginative world whose values are always analogous to, if not identical with, those of the autobiography. In what might be construed as a comment on his own achievement Muir wrote:

'The words we knew like our right hand,
Mountain and valley, meadow and grove,

Composed a legendary land...' ('The Voyage', CP '60, p.138,
1.69-71)

Muir's critics have long recognised the existence of this system.
Hollander, for example, dates the establishment of a parallel literary
universe from 1937:

In Journeys and Places Muir had gathered a volume of contemplative
lyric poems that are his typical form of poetic expression.
Figures and landscapes from classical antiquity, Christian myth,
contemporary art and life (often perceived through the senses of
Theseus, Odysseus, Penelope, or Abraham, as well as of Holderlin
or Kafka) are the subjects; Time, the Fall, the Journey their
mode of symbolic expression. (Bibliographical Study, p.13-4)

Yet the evaluation of this network is given with a confident appeal to
the familiar theme of 'naturalness' which suggests a complacent and
untroubled acceptance of Muir's own values. 'His succeeding volumes',
Hollander writes, 'naturally give a sense of growing mastery, but not of
new departures' (Bibliographical Study, p.14). It is unsurprising
that these characteristics should appear more pronounced in the late
1930s. At this time Muir was withdrawing from public debate as a
result of the controversy over Scott and Scotland, and working, through
his diary, towards the personal affirmation of Christianity that shows
the most accomplished and consistent exercising of the scheme in The
Labyrinth and One Foot in Eden. But while its markers are more numerous
and more diverse in character, and were developed over a much longer
period of time than Hollander implies, perhaps its most significant
aspect is exactly the absence of 'new departures' which seems to be so
satisfactorily regarded. That the system which produced 'Childhood'
in 1923 was substantially unchanged when it came to construction of 'The
Horses' in 1955 seems to suggest less a remarkable and admirable

consistency than a determinedly exclusive rigidity. Such stasis would seem to imply that the poetic system was constructed to preserve an artificial balance, holding in check forces of which Muir's fear is so great that he will not admit any new agent or drop a single element, lest the entire construction crumble.

The effort Muir invested in the creation of his system may be gauged from a brief enumeration of its components, showing their thematic links with his prose work along with the range of their recurrence throughout the career represented by the Collected Poems.

The elements of Muir's poetic world include abstract themes as familiar from his autobiography as, for example, time. There are more than sixty references to the notion of time in the volume,³ establishing the complaint against change, development or decay which the poet is held to voice on behalf of his trust in an alternative, immutable, transcendent reality.⁴ Equally accustomed are the terms in which this protest is presented. For instance, the poetry is based on the image of a predominantly rural landscape which mirrors the pastoral bias of the autobiography in suggesting that the countryside is the natural habitat of man.⁵ There are human settlements, villages, even small

3. See CP '60, pp.19/20/1/39-48/57/61/73/4/8/80/3/6/91/9/101/2-5/11/6/7/25-6/30-4/8/41-4/54/5/68/6/8/7/3/6/80/3/5/8/95/200/2/8/11/7/23/7/38/40/1/2/8/9/51/4/69/70/2/89/97/9/300.

4. For instance, by Butter in 'Last Years' (M&P, p.271-300) and Knight in 'Something to Pursue' (An Introduction, p.165-198).

5. Frequent reference is made to emblems of rural life: for example, in CP '60 to such obvious signs as fields: pp.19/2/4/40/2/3/59/60/9/76/7/81/3/5/6/92/3/107/9/12/5/26/30/40/1/49/54/64/9/75/82/5/227/37/45/64/5/72/89; and trees: pp.21/2/3/4/39/41/8/58/9/63/5/74/5/8/80/87/93/5/7/100/2/4/7/8/9/16/9/20/7/31/3/47/8/54/8/69/79/200/14/26/7/53/66/70/3/83/4.

towns in this world: but no cities.⁶ Large conurbations imaging Glasgow marked industrialisation for Muir, signifying the destruction of the kind of organic society idealised in Scott and Scotland.

But the poetry is more explicit than that study in its acknowledgment and acceptance of the restrictions in freedom imposed by such organisation. The scene may be composed of fields, trees and woods, divided by walls and roads,⁷ but it is also peppered with castles and towers,⁸ symbols of the social distribution of ownership by which these at the top of the hierarchy perpetuate their power over those at the bottom. The political implications of authoritarianism are hinted at in this power being an active force and these symbols retaining a practical role in the events which the poetry describes. The roads not only represent Muir's reliance on the metaphor of life as a journey — associated with a childhood reading of Pilgrim's Progress (Auto, p.28) — but also provide routes for the passage of vast numbers of people displaced, either as soldiers or refugees, in obscure wars waged by the operations of society.⁹ In the search for an acceptance of the human

6. The predominant image is the house or home: for example, CP '60 pp.19/20/40/1/2/7/82/7/95/114/25/9/30/2/72/7/86/218/9/21/30/8/53/72/4.

7. Walls are cited, for example in CP'60 pp.24/59/62/6/72/3/5/94/5/100/110/4/25/8/9/32/42/3/68/9/72/81/212/21/35/70/83; and roads on pp.39/42/3/5/7/53/61/74/86/7/91/4/5/7/100/6/7/8/9/11/4/7/22/6/30/40/58/63/4/6/7/9/74/80/5/9/91/4/202/17/9/22/3/5/33/40/5/51/2/3/66.

8. For instance, CP '60 pp.43/6/64/5/6/8/72/4/7/81/96/103/10/11/18/25/6/8/42/69.

9. Journeys are referred to in CP '60 pp.410/2/94/107/8/50/202; and wars in pp.20/39/40/3/8/61/4/70/1/3/4/6/83/5/6/91/3/4/5/101/3/7/8/13/5/21/5/8/9/30/42/8/77/9/85/7/237/44/6/50/2/62/5/6/74/80/2/9.

condition on the grounds that it does not represent ultimate reality, Muir comes perilously close to condoning political quietism of the most irresponsible variety.

The protagonists set against this landscape are drawn also from areas significant in other prose works by Muir. Named individuals appear, enacting grand themes and passions, as if this world aspired to the condition he detected in the tradition of the Border ballads;¹⁰ and the autobiographical fascination with the consciousness of animals takes up another aspect of that tradition with beasts introducing to the scene a frisson of the supernatural. They most frequently take the guise of creatures from some unspecified mixture of mythologies.¹¹

However, it is also suggested that his poetic construction is validated by its implicating more deeply elemental factors. Rock and stone, water, the sea and blood are all named to the point of incantation,¹² as if the poetry were making a bid to escape the accidental sources from which Muir drew the elements of his consciousness and so approach the condition of the transcendental world to which he aspires. Religion, for example, appears most usually in the shape of ritual, the gods of classical myth being named only a handful of times and Christian doctrine being treated analogously in a gesture towards

10. For instance, Hector (p.24), Hölderlin (p.668), Mary Stuart (p.75) Penelope (p.114) Robert Bruce (p.115) Oedipus (p.189) Prometheus (p.214) and Telemachos (p.220).

11. For example, CP '60 pp.19/20/1/6/8/9/31/42/52/61/9/70///80/5/7/99/102/8/9/13/29/32/3/42/57/60/71/6/9/200/2/7/16/46/53/8/73/4/6/8/83/91/3/9/300.

12. These elements appear less frequently but with a cumulative regularity: for instance, rock on CP '60 pp.19/23/8/31/40/1/5/8/60/5/82/94/125/131/2/40/50/2/208/330/43; water or the sea, on pp. 19/22/3/4/5/6/42/5/60/2/4/9/71/6/83/92/8/103/6/11/4/7/21/5/35/43/69/77/202/8/29; and blood on pp. 28/39/42/51/94/108/16/27/8/30/3/229/35/41/60/58/91.

universalisation.¹³ This apparent reticence, though, is undermined by the repetition of elements such as Eden and the Fall which cannot be used independently of their Judaeo-Christian connotations:¹⁴ being less eclectic in his selection of myth than the Eliot of the Four Quartets, for example, Muir is unable to convey the sense of so high a degree of deracination. This blend of Christian and classical elements serves to integrate Muir's world with the structures familiar from the English tradition, so that the memories of Orkney which provide the base of his rural vision can be read as Georgian pastoral.¹⁵ Scottish elements in the system then become not evidence of allegiance to pan-Celticism,¹⁶ but indicators of the successful assimilation of a 'peripheral' consciousness to the more familiar patterning of the 'central' literature.

However, Muir's poetry does not always rely exclusively on this system of tokens. Apart from the early doggerel written for The New Age, there are several published poems which show him attempting to express in verse ideas and beliefs other than his Christian transcendentalism. Undermining the coalition of the poetic, the religious and the unconscious which he carefully seeks to establish in the autobiography, they reveal the continuing struggle throughout his career between the different elements of his identity and his desire to express them all.

13. For instance, CP '60 pp.63/83/165/89.

14. The Fall, for example appears on CP '60 pp. 43/50/8/62/3/9/70/81/3/7/8/100/32/3/99/202/7/10/2/27/70.

15. For instance, by Al Alvarez who claims in a review of CP '60 that 'spiritually and technically... he belongs to the generation of poets which was killed off in the first World War' (The Observer, 8 May 1960, p.22).

16. See Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge.

The best-known of these pieces are probably the poems about Scotland which were selected for the final Collected Poems by virtue of having appeared by Muir's own choice in The Narrow Place (1943) and One Foot in Eden (1956): 'Scotland 1941' and 'Scotland's Winter' respectively. Expressing his anger with the cultural condition of the country, both talk explicitly of Scotland's political paralysis, attacking the people for having 'no pride but pride|pf pelf' ('Scotland 19⁴1', 1.32) now that the 'obdurate pride' which 'made us a nation' has 'robbed us of a Nation' (1.13-4). They take no comfort in any aspect of transcendentalism, being bitter attacks on those who can go 'content/ With their poor frozen life and shallow banishment' ('Scotland's Winter', 1.27-8); and they stand as representatives of the continuing fluctuations even after Scott and Scotland in his opinion of the country. No political solution may be explicitly offered in these indictments (in the name of Douglas and Bruce) of Knox and Melville, Burns and Scott; but their drive is in quite another direction from the pointers towards assimilation in English culture which conclude that study.

'Scotland 1941' was reprinted in The Narrow Place within two years of its first appearance; but the publishing history of 'Scotland's Winter' is more interesting. It was printed in The Listener (C514) and in Scottish Journey in 1935, and can therefore be seen as part of the expression of the conflicts Muir was experiencing in that period and on the eve of his final submission to transcendentalism. But it was not incorporated into a collection of his verse until 1956, although four volumes were brought out in the intervening years and although only one comma had been changed when it did appear in One Foot in Eden.

McCulloch may interpret the mood of the poem as one of 'resigned futility',¹⁷ but delaying publication until the poem might be included in his most securely transcendentalist volume suggests that Muir himself was wary of the emotions represented in this piece, and their political implications, and preferred to avert the critics' attention until it could be read as eccentric to the main trend of his thought — or, at least, until its new context could reinforce its pessimism as an alternative to the way in which the setting in Scottish Journey emphasizes its anger.

The ambiguous timing of the poem's various appearances was facilitated by — as well as reflected in — the complexities of time within 'Scotland's Winter' itself. It begins by locating itself firmly in the present:

Now the ice lays its smooth claws on the sill (1.1);

and that claim to perpetual currency, implying that the poem will be equally applicable in 1935 or 1956 or at any later date, already fore-shadows the bitterness and cynicism induced by the situation the poem describes. The winter has frozen time, preventing any hope for a change in Scotland's status: but, surprisingly, it is shown to have set in at precisely the point of Scotland's medieval history Muir usually holds to have represented her 'Golden Age'. This is a rural world undisturbed by change, where the daughter from the local water mill can only walk, not ride, from place to place. The military imagery, with the sun 'helmed' in its casket and brandishing a sword, reinforces the medieval suggestion, as do the references to Percy, Douglas, Bruce and leprosy;

17. McCulloch, 'Edwin Muir and Scotland', p.78.

but the imagery is hostile, and the sun, looking down from the hills, is at best indifferent, refusing to thaw Scotland back into life.

The rather erratic rhyme scheme and uneven line length focus attention on an even earlier and unspecified prelapsarian era by referring to the burial of Bruce,

And all the kings before
This land was kingless,
And all the singers before
This land was songless (l.16-9).

The elegiac lyricism of these shortest, repetitious lines emphasises the connection between political autonomy (albeit of a monarchical variety) and artistic fluidity. But the longest sentence in the poem ends with the longest line — 'This land that with its dead and living waits the Judgement Day' (l.20); and this suggests the failure by exhaustion of hope for amelioration before the completion of time itself. It is at this point that the mood of the poem changes, from the pessimism that McCulloch interprets as resignation to a cold, sneering contempt for the failure of the Scots to recognise their relationship to the heroes of the past. The commonalty does not know 'whence they come' (l.25), and without a clearer understanding of their own tradition and anger against its loss they remain not only frozen in time but metaphorically displaced in space — in 'shallow banishment' (l.28) — as well.

By stepping back from his customary idealisation of Scotland's rural past, Muir allows the piece to turn away from the usual direction of his poetry in order to make more effective his particular point at this time. The familiar pattern is not radically disturbed, since the new ideal, one step further back in time, remains the same kind of

coherent, hierarchical society as he usually situates in Orkney; but in coming closer — in its determinedly oppositionist stance — to the 'Our Generation' series than any other poem, 'Scotland's Winter' was clearly out of step with the general ideological commitment of the verse, so necessitating its prolonged period of obscurity. But in its anger over the state of Scotland and its clarity of construction it demonstrates Muir's continuing political interest and his ability to find expression for this aspect of his identity within poetry, the genre supposedly devoted to the exclusive admiration of a transcendentalist ideal.

Scottish Journey actually includes three poems: the other two were never republished at all. 'Pastoral' (SJ, p.100-1) opens the 'Glasgow' section as 'Scotland's Winter' had closed that dealing with Edinburgh. It is a simple tirade against the quietism of the Scottish proletariat in the face of mass unemployment. With direct reference to the structure of the nineteenth century hymn, and religion coming under attack beyond its comments on the Kirk's well-stocked pulpits, the poem is closer to incitement to riot than to Muir's more familiar theme of spiritual consolation:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him all bullocks here below,
Praise him in chief the Scottish Kirk,
For he is kind to stot and stirk. (1.25-8)

The poem indicts the empty remnants of Scottish cultural traditions, as in the penultimate stanza's exposure of the degeneration of the old pride in education:

Our stirks shall yet sing Scots Wha Hae
In kilts. Our lustier bulls and stallions
We'll educate at Balliol.
The rest shall swell the Kirk's ⁶batalions. (1.21-4)

The mock-popular form, and the rebellion against religious platitudes and political complacency, shows Muir writing in a manner as reminiscent of the early 'Edward Moore' as of the contemporaneous political satire of Auden, Spender or MacNiece. 'Industrial Scene' (SJ, p.152-3), with a parallel publishing history, is a further attack on capitalism, without any explicit reference to Scotland apart from the contextual significance of its inclusion in Scottish Journey; but again it reflects the intensity of Muir's political feeling at the time of composition. It concentrates on the cultural shams of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie:

The hundred-horse-power pub's wave-shouldering boom

And thickened voices babbling Judgement Day.

At the big house the Owner waits his doom

While his Rhine-maiden daughters sit and play

Wagner and Strauss (113-7)

As in the case of 'Pastoral', this poem is attempting to use simple stanzaic form and diction, with personifications such as 'Rest' and 'the Owner', as a pastiche of 'high' art. This return to the technique used weekly on the back page of The New Age to propagandise Douglasism while Muir was its assistant editor, together with the absence from the poem of any escape into his usual pastoral idealisation or transcendental evasion, and its situation in Scottish Journey (as Muir's penultimate attempt to find a political solution to his dilemmas), suggests strongly that it was the poem's political implications and intentions which led to its exclusion from collections of Muir's work.

These pieces from Scottish Journey show Muir's continuing — if underused — ability to write poetry not devoted to his Christian

transcendentalism; and they reveal his preference for parodying existing literary styles in the process. Indeed, his reference to convention in his poetry has become the issue which divides the critics of his verse. Those who admire his work for its defence of religion tend to praise him as the opponent of modernism and defender of the English lyric tradition, as if he had assumed in this area of his writing the role he nearly defined for himself as a critic in Transition. In order to do this, they must claim that some poems, such as Variations on a Time Theme, for example, are aberrations: the obvious debts of that sequence to The Waste Land are excused only by its following Eliot's mysticism as well as his technical experimentation.¹⁸ On the other hand, several distinguished critics have, albeit regretfully, discounted Muir's poetry as being too old fashioned and bland in diction to merit much attention.¹⁹ Yet by returning to the autobiography, it is possible to discern in the poetry an aesthetic which reveals the confusions and conflicts already examined in his prose also operating within his verse and which explains many of the stylistic elements which have caused his critics such difficulty.

The autobiography contains one passage in which Muir attempts to apply a particular strategy in the discussion of his poems, making a tactical move which goes beyond the usual suggestions that his verse is indissolubly linked with his irrational intimations of a transcendental world. In the long opening chapters of the book which establish the

18. For example, Louis Cazamian, 'Edwin Muir et le temps', Etudes Anglaises, V 3 (1952), p.263-8; J.F. Hendry, 'Time and Edwin Muir', Adam International Review, 247 (1954), p.3-7; and Brian Keeble, 'In Time's Despite: on the Poetry of Edwin Muir', Sewanee Review, 81 (1973), p.633-58.

19. For instance, Geoffrey Grigson, 'Recent Verse', Criterion, XIV (October 1934), p.141-3; Kenneth Allott, The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse (1963), p.92; Maurice Lindsay, A History of Scottish Literature (1977), p.396-8.

values by which all succeeding societies are to be judged, it nevertheless becomes clear that however privileged the Orcadians might be, their security could not be absolute by virtue of their temporal entrapment. Such a world must, for Muir, admit experiences of guilt and shame: and as well as being invoked by his curious anxieties concerning a bag of sheep-dip (Auto, p.34) and his ambiguous friendship with the daughter of a neighbouring farmer (Auto, p.40), these emotions are also associated with his having run away from a schoolboy fight with Freddie Sinclair. The incident is described as part of his childhood; but it is also brought forward, with a strange sense of the dislocation of time, as the source of a poem published almost twenty years before The Story and the Fable appeared: the 'Ballad of Hector in Hades'.

I got rid of that terror almost thirty years later in a poem describing Achilles chasing Hector round Troy, in which I... imagined Hector as noticing with intense, dreamlike precision certain little things, not the huge simplified things which my conscious memory tells me I noticed in my own flight. The story is put in Hector's mouth... That is how the image came to me, quite spontaneously: I wrote the poem down, almost complete, at one sitting. But I have wondered since whether that intense concentration on little things, seen for a moment as the fugitive fled past them, may not be a deeper memory of that day preserved in a part of my mind which I cannot tap for ordinary purposes. In any case the poem cleared my conscience. I saw that my shame was a fantastically elongated shadow of a childish moment, imperfectly remembered; an untapped part of my mind supplied what my conscious recollection left out, and I could at last see the incident whole by seeing it^{as} happening, on a great and tragic scale, to someone else. After I had written the poem the flight itself was changed, and with that my feelings towards it... My feeling

about the Achilles and Hector poem is not of a suppression suddenly removed but rather of something which had worked itself out. (Auto, p.43-4)

In keeping with the line taken throughout the autobiography, Muir here places the poem as a product of his supposedly pre-political Orcadian childhood. This dissociates it from the post-New Age, post-'Edward Moore', post-'Our Generation' period of its actual composition, enabling him to present it as something which 'came to me, quite spontaneously', as if it were utterly remote from the techniques of the professional writer which he had learned in London. Further, in this description of its radical innocence, the poem reaches back even beyond childhood, being ascribed not to his conscious recollections of the flight but to 'a deeper memory of that day preserved in a part of my mind which I cannot tap for ordinary purposes'. With this reference to a mysteriously subliminal yet benignly active creativity ('something which had worked itself out'), Muir attempts to explain the poem in the terms of his own religious faith, reclaiming it from the public domain in which it had been open to virtually any interpretation since the date of first publication. By insisting that the poem's connotations are indissolubly linked to the ideological formations of the autobiography, not only for himself but for the reader as well, he attempts to define it as an image of the impossibility of escape from earthly struggles — even through death — without divine intervention, an exposition of the bleakness attributed to the pre-Christian consciousness of the Hellenic myth. The adaptation of the story^{to} include eternal recurrence — since Hector need die only once for Homer's purpose — suggests that Muir sought to use a familiar mythic episode in order to insinuate his

own religious convictions almost unnoticed into the mind of his readers. At this point, the autobiographical account becomes an instrument for the attempted privatisation and monopolisation of the imagination; and its effect on the poem is to turn its manner from symbolism to allegory.

It is in reference to this movement that Muir's doubts over claiming the status of being a symbolist poet become explicable. C.M. Bowra's study of that aesthetic, The Heritage of Symbolism, was published in 1943, and of it Muir wrote:

An absurd thing I realised after reading Bowra's book was that I had been writing symbolist poetry very frequently for years without knowing it. (M.P., p.196)

Some critics have taken this statement as sufficient basis for the categorisation of Muir and the concentration of their own efforts, again, on the explication of 'the system of symbols', since they hold that, in Wiseman's words,

for Muir, the journey, the Fall, Eden, the labyrinth become a patterned symbology, a series of key symbols which are used over and over in slightly different circumstances. The poet releases these symbols into language in poem after poem, each time hoping that they will generate more significance. And by sheer accumulation they become richer and more meaningful.

(Beyond the Labyrinth, p.33)

But Wiseman's epigraphic quotation of the letter's reference to Bowra omits the immediately succeeding sentence, which shows Muir's awareness of some unexplored disparity between that theory and his own criteria in producing poems. 'He's inspired me to write one deliberately, which I enclose', he says;

I think it isn't really bad: but I shouldn't have written it quite like that but for his book. (Auto, p.146)

That Muir retained this vagueness in his understanding of the applicability of symbolist terminology to his own work is shown by an idea he recorded in 1947:

I have almost a volume, but not quite, by this time; I intend to call the poems Symbols, or something of that kind, for they all deal with symbolical human situations and types; and I hope this will give the volume a sort of unity, and at the same time that it won't cause the contents to be monotonous.

(Letters, p.146)

From the suggestions being that the volume be called 'Symbols or something of that kind', it is clear that Muir was not clearly committed to the notion; and yet that it occurred to him a principle sufficiently significant to provide the structuring theme of a collection of verse some years after he had read Bowra does seem a comment on the attraction the alignment held for him.

That appeal is not difficult to discern. In his introduction, Bowra's emphasis falls heavily and repeatedly on the 'fundamentally mystical' (p.2) nature of symbolisme. Placed as a reaction to nineteenth century scientific Realism, its adherents are said to have been in protest against the prevailing intellectual atmosphere,

and their protest was mystical in that it was made on behalf of an ideal world which was, in their judgement, more real than that of the senses. (p.3)

Such transcendentalist impulses could only seem sympathetic to Muir. If he held back from consciously claiming too close an affinity, it might have been on the grounds that the movement is said not to have

been, 'in any strict sense' (p.3), Christian; yet a less ambiguously phrased passage offers a suggestion towards a different explanation. Describing Mallarmé's poetry as seminal in its quest for an ideal beauty, Bowra comments:

All preliminaries, explanations, comparisons, are omitted. Only the essential points are given, and the gain in concentration and power is enormous. The poetry is fully packed. It has some of the direct appeal of music. There are no prosaic joints or interstices. (p.10)

That is to say, there is no narrative. And it is Muir's obsession with narrative which lies at the base of his aesthetic.

It is no coincidence that it should be the autobiography's account of a poem which opened this discussion. The strategy employed here is to tell the tale of a distinct, complete and integrated episode in his life: he gives us the story behind the story, as it were, the prose version of the same narrative which repeats the poem in a different form. The chief expression of the paradox lies, of course, in the book's title: the Fable may be given half the weight of the equation syntactically, but emotionally it is credited throughout with all the positive values. But while it remains inaccessible, the great fable which no-one can really approach let alone be competent to tell (Auto, p.49), it does not appear to be quite so transcendent as Muir would wish to suggest it to be. Rather, from all the evidence he supplies, it seems merely another instance of narrative: a grander, neater, more satisfying narrative perhaps — but narrative just the same. Consequently, the great act of transcendence can never become manifest: the story is reiterated in different terms, but what the autobiography gives is

simply a repetition of the same narrative structure, not an escape from it. For the Greek heroes of the 'Ballad of Hector in Hades' Muir offers himself and Freddie Sinclair. He may regard this as pointing towards some essential truth: but the reader may take the freedom to note that the proliferation of instances proves nothing beyond their own commonness. And to change the personae while leaving the pattern unaltered suggests that the fable itself, if it existed, would have no greater significance than the earthly episodes which it repeats.

Examples of Muir's repeating narrative patterns are to be found beyond his discussion of this particular poem. An Autobiography, his most compelling narrative, is after all a retelling of The Story and the Fable, itself a reworking of the pattern of his own life. The habit may be discerned, at very different levels, in the strategy of the 'Our Generation' articles, for example, and in the antagonism of brothers in his second and third novels. Indeed from a wider perspective, all his prose works can be seen to be repeating, with variations in stress, a single basic pattern: that of seeking escape from conflict, but only being able to find another form of it in place of the desired transcendence. And moreover, the character of that conflict ultimately resolves itself into the struggle between the cluster of elements associated with the Scottish side of his identity and those that marked his desire to join the English centre. Each book comes, more or less successfully, to its own compromise, and the differences between those of We Moderns and Poor Tom and Scott and Scotland should not be underestimated: but the point remains that the same conflict is being replayed again and again to the extent that repetition becomes explicit

as well as implicit theme, and that conflict is never escaped. No matter how often Muir tells the story, no matter what variations are made to details of the plot or features of the characters, its essential structure remains the same: and his role as story-teller is safely perpetual.

The opening pages of the autobiography, retelling the myths and legends of his parents, emphasise that for Muir the relating of stories was inseparably linked to the values of his Orcadian childhood. Moreover, the use of the Ballads as a critical touchstone from the early 1920s to the mid-1950s, and the shift to Scottish settings and themes in an attempt to solve his problems with authoral voice and stance in his novels, suggests that this association was expanded so that the concept of narrative always carried special reference to the notion of Scottishness for him. In the chief crisis of his career as a critic, in the 1920s, he had turned against (English) modernism because of the threat he discerned to the humanist values of his residual (Scottish) socialism; and by another repetition he holds his poetry back from the commitment to symbolism by his adherence to the narrative structures which guaranteed his keeping faith with another aspect of his Scottishness. The resulting compromise is a confusion of impulses towards modernism and reciprocal returns to pre-modernist features.

The element of symbolism in his verse, for example, is transformed into a method of making a complete narrative stand as a symbol. The 'Ballad of Hector in Hades' can be read as an allegory of his childhood flight, but it can also be seen as a fixed single image of the main problem of his life, his endless attempts to come to terms with the

conflict he could not escape. Even after death, in Hades, Hector can be given no release from the stasis of the present tense:

I run. If I turned back again
 The earth must turn with me,
 The mountains planted on the plain,
 The sky clamped to the sea. (1.13-6)

Hector had been running through European consciousness since Homer's epic was composed: only Muir refuses him escape from his crisis through death.

In 1958, he wrote to Norman MacCaig:

I've been rather daunted in the last year or two by the fear that I am keeping on writing the same poem, and I fancy that it has inhibited (horrible word) the flow. (Letters, p.202)

That fear was not groundless. The themes of escape, of timelessness, of transcendentalism, have long been recognised in his poetry; but they are not the records of a spiritual victory. Rather, they are the marks of a political defeat, of a failure to produce a synthesis from the dialectic of Scottishness and Englishness which Muir's life encapsulated. While the Scottish Journey poems show his most explicit approach to the problem, even a few of his most frequently anthologised and supposedly transcending poems can be seen to be replaying the same old story, and to be using the techniques first developed in 'Our Generation' to hide the problem while doing so.

'The Labyrinth' remains the prime example of the problem. The long opening sentence, the careful modulations of rhythm, the ambiguous conclusion ('I did not know the place'), the invasions of the world by the labyrinth: all have been interpreted as constituting Muir's most

liberal statement of religious faith. Knight's assertions are remarkably bold:

The power of the 'illusion' has been acknowledged; its presence in the poem is of a strength to deny the word itself. Do we then have a limp contradiction of that power, a hopeful assertion of faith in the existence of that other world? No. The power of an illusion does not convert it into a truth. (p.156)

His interpretation derives from the absolute quality of the statements embedded in a structure of recurring doubt:

I could not live if this were not illusion.
It is a world perhaps; but there's another. (1.46-7)
That was the real world; I have touched it once,
And now shall know it always. (1.65-6)

Yet what the poem actually embodies is the tension between the narrative — the story of Theseus — and his moments of vision. While narrative absolutely demands progression, the movement from the beginning to the end, religious vision such as Muir's requires precisely an escape from change, the achievement of temporal transcendence. By its reliance on a dramatic persona, on giving the poem the premise of being a monologue, Muir makes it impossible for it to evade its temporary and temporal nature, since speech can only be lineal and therefore 'in' time. Consequently it is not a statement of faith but of its failure; and that collapse is revealed through Muir's inability to speak directly of his own experience of repeated conflict, as if he hoped by giving it to someone from an ancient Greek myth the perpetual cycle might be broken.

The use of such personae is remarkably common in Muir's poetry. Not only does he have to tell his own story again and again; he tries to make it seem as if all other stories were approximations to the

paradigm too. But even when the 'I'-voice is not credited to a figure from history or literature, the effect is still of a literary persona speaking, as it was in 'Our Generation'.

One foot in Eden still I stand
And look across the other land. (1.1-3)

Caught uncomfortably 'still', so that there can be no movement in space or time, no return and no advance, that persona tries to reconcile the strangeness of the 'blessings' he discerns with the fact of their existence. Only the persona, described as physically having a foot in each camp, can bridge the two worlds; he literally holds the poem together, since only his words constitute the link which is its subject; and the poem reciprocates by providing the persona with an existence, since he 'lives' only in the words of the poem.

He may say that 'The World's great day is growing late' (1.3) but there is no suggestion beyond this mere statement of the approaching conclusion of time that there can be any truly alternative reality; and indeed, the finality of the end of a 'day', usually implying the start of another cycle of day and night, is problematical.

When Muir attempts to write on themes whose closeness to that Scottish cluster of associations makes him uncomfortable, he uses another of 'Moore's' techniques to avoid confronting his inability to speak clearly. The narrator does not become multiple as in the modernistic experiments of Chorus of the Newly Dead or the Variations on a Time Theme: but he does become plural. The use of 'we' in 'Our Generation' was pitched to suggest the writer's Englishness: later, as Muir recognises the failure of Social Credit to revitalise the ideal society,

it becomes the mark of the communal voice accredited to the organic community of Scotland's past. In the 'Complaint of the Dying Peasantry', for instance, the specificity of reference to figures from the tradition and the echo of the four-line Ballad stanza stress that voice's Scottish accent:

Our old songs are lost,
Our sons are newspapermen
At the singers' cost.
There were no papers when

Sir Patrick Spens put out to sea
In all the country cottages
With music and ceremony
For five centuries.

Till Scott and Hogg, the robbers, came
And nailed the singing tragedies down
In dumb letters under a name
And led the bothy to the town.

Sir Patrick Spens shut in a book,
Burd Helen stretched across a page:
A few readers look
There at the effigy of our age.

The singing and the harping fled
Into the silent library;

But we are with Helen dead
And with Sir Patrick lost at sea.

Even the story of the failure of stories can be given as a compressed narrative by Muir: but his attempts to save the tradition amount in the end to no more than recording its loss in its own terms. In 'The Difficult Land', this appeal to the notion of integrated but vanished

community is coupled with the attempted transcendental reconciliation of 'One Foot in Eden':

'This is a difficult country, and our home'. (1.52)

But the sense of entrapment is expressed, not neutralised, by the narrators' enumeration of the antithetical 'despairs' and 'love'.

The expository tone of Muir's poetry, as if he were dealing with a number of shared assumptions, arises from his need to argue the case for transcendentalism, to persuade his readers — and, in the light of multiple repetition, himself — of the openness of that escape route. By force of the habit acquired from 'Edward Moore', he seeks to appear as the plain man who uses language honestly and directly, responsibly avoiding the confusions of stylistic complexity. But this attitude of accepting a reality to which the only response is flight is not only paradoxical but laden with political implications. The ideal of Muir's transcendentalism is timelessness: but the practical consequence of its search has been seen to be, ironically, a form of stasis, of being timelessly held in the attitude of conflict and flight. (The 'despair' invoked at the end of each reading of 'The Combat' might more properly be attributed to the narrator and the poet than to 'the killing beast that cannot kill' (1.48), since the vision is of another repetition of another conflict that can never be over.) Amongst this tangle of aspiration and failure, political quietism becomes the order of the verse.

'The Little General', for example, has tended to attract the attention of critics only in so far as it repeats again an episode from the autobiography. Butter comments only that in the poetic version of the

landlord's shooting trips to the islands,

here more is done to make the details meaningful. The feather in the hunter's cap corresponding to the falling feathers of the dead birds bring the two together. Hunter and quarry and the remnant of an ancient tower on the hill, which has looked out on many such scenes, together form a 'Perennial emblem painted on a shield'. (M&P, p.200-1)

In fact, there is not much of Muir's socialist anger left in his autobiographical indictment of the economic system which resulted in the family being expelled from Orkney. He notes only that the General 'was a very bad landlord, and in a few years drove my father out of the farm by his exactions' (Auto, p.15); and indeed the prose seems to describe the poem written in 1938 rather than the experience of the 1890's:

It was a mere picture; I did not feel angry with the General or sorry for the birds; I was entranced with the bright gun, the white smoke, and particularly with the soft brown tabs of leather on the shoulders of his jacket. (Auto, p.15)

In making 'a mere picture' of the events, Muir depoliticises them. The General comes 'Across the sound, bringing the island death' (1.2), and he did kill not only animals and birds but also, through capitalist exploitation, the Orcadian life which the Muirs knew. Yet the poem expresses no anger and attributes no blame for this, since once caught in the stasis of the poem,

Hunter and quarry in the boundless trap (1.5),

the General can do nothing that is real and consequently loses responsibility. The image is frozen to hold the narrative and prevent the development of consciousness such as Muir himself experienced

through his Glaswegian socialism; and in that conservative denial of movement his aesthetic is again indicted.

Muir's aesthetic runs the same themes of conflict, flight and the failure of escape through his poetry again and again, to the point of obsession, and places his dilemma between the Scottish and the English aspects of himself at the centre of his writing. If Alvarez's contention that 'the poetry... is Muir's identity'²⁰ is valid, it is only in the sense that the poetry embodies again the struggle that denies him any such unitary character. In his last critical work, the lectures given while he was Charles Eliot Norton Professor at Harvard in 1955-6, this is again the dominant theme as he seeks once more for a solution.

20. Alvarez, review of CP '60, The Observer, 8 May 1960, p.22.

Chapter VIII:

Conclusions: The Estate of Poetry, 1955

1955 To Harvard

1956 To Cambridge

One Foot in Eden

1959 Died

1962

. The Estate of Poetry

VIII.1

In the context of the work to which Muir's critics pay most attention -- his poetry and autobiography -- the replaying of the conflict arising from the clash between his 'Scottishness' and his 'English' literary career in the lectures of The Estate of Poetry only underlines the centrality of these themes to his writing. Yet there are levels of repetition involved here which can be seen as slightly more subtle than simple continuation. That the conflict still requires discussion in 1955 shows that Muir had failed to reconcile these warring elements -- but he had also proved unable to take the other alternative: the suppression of either side. Had he felt it possible to place himself wholly within a Scottish framework or to assimilate completely^e to English culture, he might have successfully escaped his tormented situation: the precise nature of his position was that each side was too strong to be denied. Read in the context of one of those major elements, the 'English' critical career to which they form the conclusion, these lectures reveal the complexity of Muir's dilemma by taking their place in the repetition of another pattern -- the suppression of his full Scottish interests in order that his reputation might be enhanced (as in his time with The New Age), followed by the explicit consideration of Scottishness (as in the release of his contributions to The Freeman).

Muir's career as a literary journalist did not end in 1939. Although he never matched the output of the mid 1930s¹, he certainly maintained more than occasional interest in writing for English periodicals. Of the

1. For instance, seventy-four pieces are attributed to 1935, and seventy to 1936.

items recorded by Hoy and Mellow, some eight hundred and twenty were written in the twenty-six years from 1913 to 1939, while approximately four hundred and fifty are listed for the nineteen years between 1940 and 1959, showing a remarkably slight diminution in average annual production rates with age. Muir seems never to have been financially secure; but however severe the pecuniary pressures under which he wrote, the significance of this area of his work cannot be limited to claiming, in Butter's words, that 'it was a sad waste that he did not have more time for his poetry and for critical works on a larger scale' (M & P, p.264). Rather, the importance of this body of criticism lies in its revelation that the effects of Muir's anomalous situation were not escaped by the espousal of transcendentalism in 1939 but continued to mark his prose as well as his poetry to the end of his life.

The most immediately apparent of the various levels at which the retrenchment of this phase of his career can be seen to be operating is at that of the new conservatism of his approach. In the 1920s and 1930s Muir had written for an extraordinarily wide selection of periodicals, ranging from established papers such as The Athenaeum to innovative English, American and Scottish magazines such as The Calendar of Modern Letters, The Freeman and The Modern Scot. But from 1940, The Listener and The Observer become the context for the publication of the majority of his pieces. Both of these had established themselves as a middle-brow, general-interest papers: and since neither gave first priority to the propagation of a chosen political or aesthetic programme, their review columns could not carry the importance or urgency with which Muir had been accustomed to write. Moreover, the books to which they wished to direct Muir's attention offered a much narrower range of

topics against which to exercise his skills. At the beginning of his career he had, with notable eclecticism, covered works on psychology, religion and philosophy, as well as literature of all genres and several nationalities; but as if The Structure of the Novel had been his only theoretical production, he was now largely confined to reviewing fiction, especially in maintaining his association with The Listener. His situation seems to repeat his position in the late 1920s, when he had felt compelled to deal always with 'the half-formed, the incomplete, the mediocre and the promising';² but while his response then had been to give up reviewing altogether in order to write his own novels, the failure of those books and the consequent development of his career had closed any such options that he might have considered in the 1940s or 1950s.

Yet there is an element of complacency in Muir's later work for periodicals too. Even while living as warden of Newbattle Abbey College in the years between 1950 and 1955, when the first edition of his Collected Poems in 1952 and the award of the C.B.E. in 1953 were bringing literary prestige to accompany his reasonable financial stability, he made no noticeable reduction in his reviewing commitments. Content in the main to précis the plots of the works under consideration, commenting occasionally on some error of taste or style, he pays little attention to more general aesthetic questions. While it might be argued that the novels of this time offered less stimulus to a critic than had the first manifestations of literary modernism in the 1920s, it remains pertinent to note that the material compulsion on Muir to write critically was probably less absolute than at any other time of his life — and that when he did meet important material he noticeably failed to come with the

2. E.M. - Schiff, 22.2.27, NLS Ms 17671, ff 185-7 (186).

challenge it provided. For instance, his review of a selection of books on existentialism works throughout at the level of noting that

Existentialism is a serious movement and not a mere fashion, and in the last twenty years it has inspired and in a sense produced an unusual number of remarkable writers: Heidegger and Jaspers in Germany, and Sartre, Marcel and Camus in France.

Following superficial comments on the individual volumes, he can only conclude, lamely, that

the gulf between the two kinds of Existentialism is so great that one has some trouble in remembering that both have certain beliefs in common. (C1002)

Articles written for periodical publication or as occasional lectures in these years suffer from the same lack of spirit. Those collected for Essays on Literature and Society³ not only represent the problem, but also suggest its cause. Each of Muir's chief areas of interest is indicated within this volume: but the terms in which this is done show only the repetition of established ideas — and a further degree of loss of nerve. Henryson, Burns and Scott stand for Scottish literature: but there is no consideration of the Renaissance Movement or even, had he wanted to deal exclusively with individuals, of MacDiarmid. Kafka, Spengler and Holderlin personify Continental writing: Broch and Feuchtwanger are omitted. And English literature is figured in Chapman, Shakespeare, Browning and Hardy: there is not even an attempt to record his mature opinion of Eliot, Pound, Joyce,

3. Essays on Literature and Society (1949) [henceforth 'Essays']⁷

Lawrence or Lewis. Further, the essays themselves seem to amount to little more than piecemeal elaborations on the rewriting of literary traditions which he had attempted before 1940. The piece on 'Burns and Popular Poetry', for instance, takes up a contemporary debate with Eliot on the role of a 'sensitive, critical and educated' audience for poetry (Essays, p.61); but its main point is still to emphasise Burns's peculiar status as a national poet of truly popular appeal, to which he had drawn attention as early as 1923 (C153) and which had been a chief factor in the argument of Scott and Scotland: there is nothing gained by repeating in 1949 ~~the~~ opinion which had become standard, not only in his own oeuvre but within the writings of the Renaissance, that Burns

is a myth evolved by the communal imagination, a communal poetic creation, a Protean figure; we can all shape him to our own likeness for a myth is endlessly adaptable; so to the respectable this secondary Burns is a decent man; to the Rabelaisian, bawdy;... to the Nationalist, a patriot; to the religious, pious; to the self-made man, self-made; to the drinker, a drinker. (Essays, p.57)

Similarly, articles on subjects Muir has not previously tackled also tend to invoke terms already familiar in his writing. The analysis of King Lear, for example, defines the play as a conflict between civilization and barbarism:

of the great tragedies King Lear is the only one in which two ideas of society are directly confronted, and the old generation and the new are set face to face, each assured of its own right to power... Regan, Goneril and Cornwall never feel that they have done wrong, and this is because they represent a new idea; and new ideas, like everything new bring with them their own kind of innocence. (Essays, p.35)

In this description of the 'new idea' as worshipping Nature because it gives its acolytes 'the freedom they hunger for, absolves them from the plague of custom' (Essays, p.39) there are strong echoes of 'The Assault on Humanism's' condemnation of modernism's preconception 'that culture and civilisation are things which stand between mankind and itself' (C160).

Scottish literature clearly receives more explicit attention during this period than was given it in the columns of The New Age; but it can be said to be suppressed in as much as it only appears as carrying standards relevant to the criticism of literature in general within The Estate of Poetry, so that the overall pattern is in parallel with that completed by the essays written for The Freeman. The first lecture is entitled 'The Natural Estate', and although the jockeying for position between the elements marked for Muir as 'English' or 'Scottish' continues throughout the lectures, this initial movement -- repeating the successful strategy of the autobiography -- establishes the values of Orcadian narrative as the standard by which all that follows is to be judged. Muir may claim that he is

not advocating a return to a past that has gone forever, or romanticizing the coarseness of peasant life, or its poverty and hardship (Estate, p.8);

but the argument of the lectures depends upon precisely such a desired movement, and their failure results from the acknowledging of its impossibility.

Repeating the patterning of the autobiography's values, these lectures hold the chief virtue of literature to be its spontaneous,

'natural' relationship with the subconscious mind. This irrational touchstone is to be applied to each stage of the literary process: he concedes, for instance, that

the poet does attain part, sometimes the chief part of his excellence, by the rules of art, and that poetry, if conceived in a state of inspiration, or divine madness, or possession, is not born except with the assistance of art (Estate, p.27);

but since the chosen representative poet is Wordsworth, and he is said to have been able to write well only from direct contact with nature -- 'Instead of turning to the human scene, he went back to the hills and valleys which had first nourished his vision, but which would not nourish it much longer' (Estate, p.38) -- this is merely a strategical move whose effect is to reposition the intuitive within the structure without detracting from its importance. Similarly, the poem is itself to be about natural things: 'it is possible to write a poem about horses', he argues,

for, apart from the work they do for us, they have a life of their own; it is impossible to write a poem about motor cars, except in a false rhetorical vein, for they have no life except what we give them by pushing a starter. (Estate, p.8-9)

And at the furthest end of the scale, criticism's 'greatest danger' (Estate, p.69) lies in the New Criticism's effects in denaturalising the reading process: ridiculing the attempt 'to examine a poem curiously, arresting it every now and then to scrutinize a line, a phrase, a word' (Estate, p.64), his complaint is that such a method

shuts the poem in upon itself as an object, not of enjoyment but of scrutiny, and cuts it off from the air which it should breathe and its spontaneous operation on those who are capable of

receiving it. Everything is slowed down or arrested; the poem cannot get on; the movement, and the movement of a poem is an essential part of it, is held up, while we examine its parts in isolation. One thinks of a laboratory; and indeed the analysis of poetry, pushed to this length, resembles a scientific test. (Estate, p.69)

Perhaps Muir was never so comfortable in his persona as the plain man avoiding the élitism of specialisation through an appeal to common sense as when he writes here:

I confess that this kind of criticism, so thorough and so mistaken, seems to me of very little use to any reader, and that for myself it gives me a faint touch of claustrophobia, the feeling that I am being confined in a narrow place with the poem and the critic, and that I shall not get away until all three of us are exhausted. (Estate, p.69)

The stress on this being a personal point of view ('I confess', 'for myself', 'I am being confined', 'I shall not get away'), the feigned sorrow at the assumed error of others ('so thorough and so mistaken') and the tinge of urbane amusement with which he regards American earnestness (in the image of forcible intellectual imprisonment) as if it were evidence of a provincial over-seriousness, all place the speaker as a direct descendant of the urbane 'Edward Moore'. And it is this use of the persona that indicates the context in which the plea for naturalness can more fully be understood, since the conditions which led to his invention in 1919 are still informing the arguments of 1955.

Although the definition of the lectures' main topic echoes the close of 'Scotland's Winter', that theme is examined only in the context of 'English' literary modernism's response to the loss of an exclusive, élitist public as a consequence of the 1870 Education Act:

Sometimes poets are visited by a horrified surprise at the realization that things should be as bad as they are; that their audience has melted away. And for the audience there seems to have been substituted an alarming, vast, shapeless something, deaf and blind to a once recognized and accepted part of life, and a human inheritance. That something is called the public, and it is quite unworried, does not know *what* it has lost, and goes its way. (Estate, p.2)

The impression that the terms of Transition are again being recalled in this appeal to an inherited tradition and its primal importance is reinforced when Wordsworth is brought forward as the ideal poet; yet he is said to have had his imagination 'humanized' by his preserving a contact with nature (Estate, p.38). The logical modification of this apparently illogical -- and at least paradoxical -- argument is to find an image of the ideal aesthetic conditions in a peasant society: and the repetition of Scott and Scotland's distinction between Burns's poems and the Border Ballads again brings forward Muir's image of that organic community as the ideal naturally to be preferred in ^Position to the urbanised, industrialised world of 'secondary' objects (Estate, p.8).

Yet Muir's justification of his scheme here is highly suspect. His commendation of rural society is made primarily on religious grounds: for example, later generations are deracinated because they cannot share the peasants'

sense of the mystery surrounding them, in which they saw at one glance and with no sense of incongruity, Christian revelation and natural magic. (Estate, p.17).

But although Muir nods in the direction of spiritual supremacy at various points in the lectures, noting, for example, that 'the peasant believes more strongly than any other class in another world' (Estate, p.53),

and commenting, quite startlingly, that Yeats had 'apparently inexhaustible reserves of Original Sin' (Estate, p.52), his argument is not in favour of the transcendentalist escape for which he might have hoped, but an exposition of the aesthetic which he had evolved in his own writing as a way of living with his conflicts.

Avoiding the political implications of the concept of an organic society, Muir claims that it is narrative which creates the community:

We step into the picture book when we enter a church with frescoes picturing the Creation, the history of the patriarchs and the Judean kings and prophets, the Annunciation, the birth, life, and death of Christ, and the wanderings of the apostles... For centuries the story and the painting and the poetry were shared by all, from the different orders of society. (Estate, p.102-3)

The subject of the plot may be Christianity, but it is the existence of a shared appreciation of the convention of story telling that is essential to Muir's programme:

The tragic story affects us with a unique power because it moves in time, and because we live in time. It reminds us of the pattern of our lives; and within that pattern it brings our loves, our passions, their effects, and unavoidable chance...A story gives a more complete idea of our temporal lives than any other means that has been discovered. (Estate, p.29)

And it is the loss of that shared structure in modernist writing that he laments:

with the disappearance of the great^{er} audience the story has declined; some poets of our time have used it effectively: I think of Robert Frost and certain poems of T.S. Eliot. But the story, although it is our story, is disappearing from poetry. (Estate, p.29)

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Disingenuously omitting to specify the poems to which he refers encourages the reader to interpret this as advocacy of religious poetry such as the Four Quartets; but the terms in which Muir commends the aesthetic of the Ballads suggests that he may have begun rather from his continuingly unacknowledged fascination with the techniques of modernist writing as displayed in Eliot's early imagistic poems. Following the pattern of Scott and Scotland, Muir here repeats his failure to examine the nature of Scottish society in the eighteenth century, commenting only that

the ballads are, with respect to Burns, on a different level; the level of tragic acceptance...They lie on the other side of the great plateau of the eighteenth century, with its humanitarian passion and its vast hopes for mankind. (Estate, p.13)

But again, it is not the religious subservience that distinguishes the Ballads, in this account, but their ability to blend narrative with imagism, to turn an essentially historical (temporal) story into a single static (eternal) image. That story is traditional, since

except for those which are concerned with legendary or supernatural subjects, most of the ballads deal with actual events. 'Sir Patrick Spens' describes a historical incident. A ship was sent out in winter to bring a Norwegian princess to Scotland to marry a Scottish king. On the way back the ship was wrecked, and the princess and the Scottish lords who had gone to escort her were drowned. When, long after this, Walter Scott and James Hogg were going about the Scottish Borders persuading old women to sing or intone the old poetry, people no longer knew the occasion of the ballad. History had been transmuted into poetry, and only the poetry was left. (Estate, p.15)

Yet the feature of that poetry which most excites Muir is its compression:

in reading the Ballads,

their economy, especially in the dramatic deployment of dialogue, is what strikes one first, and after that their use of tragic irony. (Estate, p.13)

The use of dialogue to avoid the difficulties of the narrator's stance clearly attracted Muir; but 'Sir Patrick Spens' is used as the chief example here precisely because of the narrator's assumption that a description of the actual loss of the ship would be superfluous since everyone in his audience already knows the story: 'the balladist has seen the action, the storm gathering, the ship sinking, and nothing but that' (Estate, p.19).

Read—at least in part — as a defence of his own aesthetic, these lectures assume a new importance. The reference to horses and motor-cars as possible and impossible subjects for poems ceases to be whimsical illustration and places the point as a reference to the comparative success of his own, much-anthologised poem⁴ and of Marinetti's advocacy of a race-automobile adorned with great pipes like serpents with explosive breath' as an aesthetic object 'more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace'.⁵ And yet the reliance on the image of a lost society, caught immutably in the stasis of the past, as the chief support of his programme anticipates the loss of nerve which leads Muir to return in the end to a pessimistic state of being caught between irreconcilable

4. Hollander lists its inclusion in 5 volumes:

- B3 Thomas Moulton The Best Poetry of 1924 (New York, 1924)
- B4 L.A.G. Strong The Best Poems of 1924 (Boston, 1924)
- B5 S.A. Coblentz Modern British Lyrics (New York, 1925)
- B9 E.O. Grover Animal Lover's Knapsack (New York, 1926)
- B10 W.H. Hamilton Holyrood: A Garland of Modern Scots Poems (1926)

5. I.T. Marinetti, The Declaration of Futurism (Milan, 1908), section 4

forces. Only in the Border land between England and Scotland appropriately enough, can he find the theoretical support for a way of surviving his own situation without transcending it: but even there he finds himself caught between the ideals of the past and the dangerous attractions of the present. Whether or not the society which produced the Ballads was ever remotely such as Muir described, he acknowledges that it had passed and 'cannot be recovered; we cannot even wish for it: we have been irreversibly changed' (Estate, p.94).

This inability to integrate the concept of change within his collation of those features marked for Muir as 'Scottish' merely reaffirms his continuing definition of Scotland as belonging to the rural, agricultural, intuitive, positive but inaccessible past, with England standing for the urban, industrial, rational, negative and inescapable present; and this reiteration shows Muir finally to have remained incapable of resolving the tensions to which this position gave rise. Consequently his ultimate reliance upon repetition must be interpreted not as the mark of optimistic persistence but as the badge of a stubbornly unacknowledged defeat. And in parallel to this theoretical redundancy, all his writing, in poetry and prose, can be distinguished by its assumption of the condition of stasis which proved only to mirror, not to transcend, his dilemma.

VIII.2

For some|time towards the end of the pre-Reformation Age there must have existed in Scotland a high culture of the feelings as well as of the mind: a concord which was destroyed by the rigours of Calvinism, so that hardly a trace of it has been left. What took its place was either simple irresponsible feeling side by side with arid intellect, or else that reciprocally destructive confrontation of both for which Gregory Smith found the name of 'the Caledonian Antisyzygy', a recognition that they are irreconcilable, and that Scottish life is split in two beyond remedy. That Scottish life is split in two is certain; it is my main argument in this essay. But that it has always been split in two is false...and that it should be split in two, as Hugh M'Diarmid seems to claim in his essay on the Caledonian Antisyzygy, is a theory which not even the intellect can sustain. The mere assertion of life in its most simple form is an act of reconciliation.

(Scott and Scotland, p.61-2)

The image of a peasant aesthetic which Muir develops in his writings -- from his first critical articles through the autobiographies to The Estate of Poetry -- depends upon the notion that narrative essentially demands the discerning of pattern in a collection of apparently miscellaneous data, the telling of a story being the reconciliation of disparate elements by the procession from beginning to end through time.

Such might, with equal aptness, be given as the defining characteristics governing the composition of literary theses. Again, the prime demand is for the selectivity of the author, who is caught in a mesh of restricting influences. At the behest of academic convention, for example, the writer must present a case through the decision to make

this argument rather than that, often at the cost of quite excluding the other. Under the determination of the temporal linearity of the written structure, each point must be given successive priority, taking a position of subservience to those which it follows and dominance over those which come after it as if such were their only and immutable relation, in order that the chosen figure might be discerned more easily -- so that, in fact, a better story might be told.

The tale which this thesis relates is of the conflicts between the 'English' and 'Scottish' clusters of elements within Muir's identity, and of the literary personae which he developed in order to cope with such tensions but by which he could never resolve the essential issues. Such a story lacks the easier satisfactions proffered by Muir's own version of events. Not only does it omit the comforting pretence that every aspect of life and work can be cosily subsumed within a single interpretation which thereby reveals some absolute truth:⁶ it also admits that the choices made in outlining this figure have been determined by a desire to highlight one particular, neglected aspect at the cost of fictively pretending the irrelevance of all others. And further, it eschews the reassuring familiarity of the Bildungsroman structure -- following the hero from childhood to maturity -- which underlies the autobiographies' drive towards the triumph of Christianity, replacing it with the image of a writer inescapably tormented by a social, cultural and political situation which came to inform and negate every attempted act of transcendence. Such a reading reinterprets Muir's opposition to the principle of eternal conflict in the concept of the

6 For example, no mention has been made of his translations, recently re-examined by Robertson in 'Edwin Muir's contact with German Literature and its influence on his Thought and Poetry'.

25.
Caledonian Antisyzygy -- so strong a revulsion that he deems its anti-thesis, reconciliation, the basic 'assertion of life' itself -- not as evidence of the wisdom gained by having gone beyond such notions but as the agonised repulsion of one who sees his own painful and inescapable situation too closely anatomised.

This is certainly a sadder and more disturbing story than the overly-familiar saga of the Orcadian mystic's salvation. Yet in its attempted analysis of the public forces which determined Muir's writings and in the framework of which those productions continue to affect our perceptions, it perhaps offers the hope of a more conscious awareness of the past from which the story of the future will proceed.

Textual Appendices

Appendix 1 (a) : The New Age, 1919 - 1921

Although the precise dates of Muir's employment as assistant editor to The New Age are unknown, the time span involved can definitely be placed between his arrival in London in September 1919 and his departure for the Continent in August 1921. And while the exact degree of his responsibility for the paper during that time remains similarly uncertain, his wish to dissociate himself from the journal when writing the autobiography — shown in the emphasis on the dispute over the 'Notes of the Week' (Auto, p.171) — suggests that he would have made the most in that account of any other major dispute he had had with Orage during that time. From the support for the 'Douglas-New Age scheme' expressed in 'Our Generation', and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it must be assumed that Muir was, at least, not opposed to the editorial policy of the paper. If the increasing rigidity of structure and the sheer weight of repetition in the magazine over this period reflects Orage's waning interest in politics as the attractions of Gurdjieff's mysticism grew for him, they also reflect Muir's inability to revitalise the paper.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of The New Age was always the breadth of its interests. With the 'totalising' concern, derived from its socialist background and Douglasite philosophy, for all aspects of life, it aimed to cover new developments in as many areas of thought as it possibly might. To cite just a few editions from a single year before 1919 as examples, the issue of 16 February 1911 contained a supplement on housing, town planning and architecture, and articles on Machiavelli, the Party system, American culture and Disraeli as well as reviews, letters and cartoons. On 25 May, lectures on dramatic theory by William Peel were accompanied by pieces on 'The Decline and Fall of the Labour Party' and 'Judges and Justice'. C.M. Grieve's 'The Young

'Astrology' was printed on 20 July; and The New Age which appeared on 19 October carried T.E. Hulme's 'Notes on Bergson'.

Ironically, Muir's influence was insufficient to maintain the very breadth which had attracted him to The New Age before any contemporary Scottish magazine. Its main development between 1919 and 1921 seems to be towards a greater reliance on the standard features of the periodical at the expense of the occasional articles and short series which had provided so great a sense of variety in earlier days. Regular columns — such as the expositions of Douglasism, 'Towards National Guilds', 'Hengist's' 'Epistles to Provincials', Pound's 'The Revolt of Intelligence', 'Cosmoi's' 'World Affairs' and Muir's own 'Our Generation' — are so extended as to seem merely habitual. At the same time, the reviewing section of the paper falls into a set pattern from which it rarely departs: drama is usually covered by J.F. Hope, art by 'B.H. Dias' and music by 'William Atheling', while books are discussed in 'R.H.C.'s' 'Readers and Writers' column. With the regular opening of the magazine with 'Notes of the Week' and its invariable closing with letters and the 'Pastiche' section, the differences between issues of the paper become minimal. The contents of three editions — taken from near the beginning, the middle and towards the end of Muir's assistantship — exemplify the recurrence of accepted elements. The New Age of 1 January 1920 contains articles on women in industry, 'Relativity and Metaphysics', and psycho-analysis, with 'Towards National Guilds', 'The Revolt of Intelligence - IV', drama, music, art and literature columns from the usual contributors, letters and pastiches. At the end of the year, the Christmas edition of 23 December carries 'Notes of the Week', an article by Douglas on the mechanics of consumer control, 'World

Affairs', 'Our Generation', the same reviewer's columns and 'AER's' 'Views and Reviews', another regular feature. Letters are replaced by an extra review; but the pastiches continue undaunted. Just before Muir left London, the issue of 14 July 1921 contained 'Notes of the Week', 'World Affairs', 'Our Generation', an article on 'Einstein's Dilemma', the Psycho-analysis column, 'Readers and Writers', Hope's drama review, 'Views and Reviews', a music review and some letters. The pastiche column is slightly reduced to leave space for a selection of press-cuttings.

Clearly, the magazine did continue to publish interesting and adventurous material, and its influence on writers such as Pound, Eliot and Grieve suggests that their interest continued well into the period of its advocacy of Social Credit despite this retrenchment. Even a less enterprising New Age seems to have been in advance of most contemporary magazines. But the paper's growing reliance on a formulaic structure does suggest its entrapment in a vicious circle derived from its alignment with Social Credit. Determined to persuade its readers of the virtues of Douglasite persuasion, it has no alternative but to reiterate its message again and again; the editions of the paper come to seem indistinguishable, so the readership drops; and The New Age can only respond by saying the same things once more, with even greater emphasis resulting from the sense of urgency as the policy seems to be losing ground. So close a parallel to the development of 'Our Generation' demonstrates the extent to which Muir was imbued with the general ethos of the paper, reflects how thoroughly he had absorbed its politics and its concomitant and repetitious stylistic practices, and shows the nature of its seminal influences upon many levels of his ideology and his writing.

Appendix 1 (b) : 'Our Generation' and Eliot's 'Commentaries'

In her article on 'Edwin Muir and Scotland',¹ McCulloch suggests that since in Scott and Scotland

the description of the effects of the divided Scottish sensibility is strikingly similar to T.S. Eliot's theory of the dissociation of sensibility in 'the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson or Browning' ... it may be that Muir was influenced by Eliot's theory when he came to examine Scottish literary development. (p.72)

While the full history of the relationship between Muir and Eliot is still to be investigated, this tentativeness of approach seems to imply that McCulloch doubts the sufficiency of material in support of this theory. But this appears an excessively cautious attitude, since there is much easily-available evidence which goes beyond the echoes of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in the autobiography² to show their writing certainly displaying interesting parallels long before the composition of Variations on a Time Theme.

The last 'Our Generation' article appeared on 28 September 1922; and although 'Causerie de Jeudi' ran from November that year till July 1923, the breakdown in the structure of that column and the very different method and topics it follows prevent any claim that Muir's New Age material and Eliot's Criterion editorials -- which began with the 'Notes' of July 1923 (I,4) -- overlap. Differences other than the

1. Akros, XVI 47 (August, 1981), p.67-81.

2. For instance:

'The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' ('Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919); Selected Essays by T.S. Eliot (1923), p.13-22 (p.17); 'If the soul is immortal and the personality is not, obviously our real task is not to cultivate but to get rid of personality' (Auto, p.131).

time of writing also separate the two series. For instance, the 'Commentaries' were editorials, with all the prestige and importance consequent upon their special authority and initial position in each issue, while 'Our Generation', although embodying the ethos of the Douglas-New Age Scheme more completely than any other single column in the paper, had none of this prominence; and there was no acknowledgement of Muir's position as assistant editor. Further, The New Age was a weekly paper of radical politics whose totalising concern for all aspects of social and individual life naturally led it from economic propaganda to a strong concern for the condition of the arts while The Criterion, appearing quarterly or monthly at various times in its history, was primarily a literary periodical, albeit, as Eliot was at pains to point out, in the widest sense of the term:

It is desirable to maintain our designation of a 'literary' review, because there is no other label which indicates so briefly the subjects to which this review is indifferent. The term serves to remind us that we are not concerned with matters of passing interest. We continue to publish the best fiction and the best verse that we can find, and to interest ourselves in the problems of applied and theoretical literary criticism and the maintenance of standards, and in the study and teaching of literature. But this same critical attitude is extended to all the problems of contemporary civilization. Historical and biographical studies will have a larger part, naturally; but The Criterion is concerned with everything that can be examined in a critical spirit...

In the theory of politics, in the largest sense, The Criterion is interested, so far as politics can be dissociated from party politics, from the passions or fantasies of the moment, and from problems of local and temporary importance. Which party is in power at home, or what squabble may be taking place in the Balkans, is of no interest, nor is jockeying for positions in treaties and

peace-pacts. But the general relations of civilized countries among each other should be examined; and the philosophies expressed or implicit in various tendencies, such as communism or fascism, are worthy of dispassionate examination.

(VII 4, June 1928, p.3)

In fact, a party allégiance can be detected in Eliot's writings: in considering the difficulties of editing a magazine, he notes that

the success of any periodical depends upon the advertisers. That is to say, the material prosperity of modern civilization depends upon inducing people to buy what they do not want, and to want what they should not buy. The New Age would explain this necessity; we cannot go into the matter so profoundly. But it seems a very flimsy structure; and the periodical press is a symptom, a result, not a cause. For the moment, we leave it at that. (VIII 31, December 1928, p.189)

That The New Age is not said to suggest or discuss an account but absolutely to 'explain' the financial system implies that Eliot accepts the paper's scheme, to the point where he seems to be recommending it to his own readers. And that he declares 'we cannot go into the matter so profoundly', leaving the matter at that, distinguishes the differing, less directly political scope of The Criterion. Clearly Eliot read The New Age, as might be expected of a colleague of Pound; but although the 'Commentaries' follow 'Our Generation' temporally, there is no evidence that Eliot particularly noticed Muir's work, and it seems likely that the parallels between these series reflect not the direct influence on one writer by another, but the shared elements in their responses to the similarities of their situations.

There are ninety-six 'Our Generation' articles, and to prevent the time lapse between the two sequences from making comparisons seem too

tenuous, only thirty 'Commentaries', up to July 1929, have been considered; and yet the likenesses remain striking.

Although Eliot claims not to be concerned 'with matters of passing interest', each 'Commentary' consists, like an 'Our Generation' article, of reflections on some three or four recent events. Each is treated independently, with no overt attempt at thematic linking except in the most obvious cases; but the use of short titles tucked in near the margin at the start of a topic gives these columns a greater sense of fragmentariness. Neither series is afraid to devote an entire article to a single issue of particular importance (for example, on 29 December 1921 Muir devotes his article to reflections on the role of 'Our Generation'; in January 1926 (IV 1, p.1-6), Eliot gives an essay on 'The Idea of a Literary Review'): but the general pattern is for there to be several topics with the last always being given the briefest consideration. Although The Criterion's programme precluded the discussion of such directly political issues as Muir was keen to include (for example, unemployment in C73-2/12/6/7 et cetera, or the miners' strike in C73-23), they do choose broadly compatible cultural topics, and they occasionally treat them in a surprisingly similar manner.

This is apparent, for example, in the way in which they acknowledge the Arnoldian legacy to the tradition in which they see their articles. Arnold's redefinition of the relationship between 'culture' and 'society' included the proposition that 'the men of culture are the true apostles of equality',³ recreating a public accommodation for the idea that those who were primarily 'men of letters' might profitably extend their

3. Arnold, Culture and Society, quoted by Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology (1976), p.104.

critical faculties to consider broader cultural and political issues. His realignment of social and cultural criticism was implicit in the Guild Socialist movement that had provided the context of Muir's early intellectual and political growth,⁴ and that the tradition was largely taken for granted is reflected in Muir's referring to Arnold only in passing. Culture and Society is built around antagonism to the popular press, and it is usually when Muir is continuing this campaign in 'Our Generation' that Arnold is named: for example,

It is incredible, but the Saturday Review does not appear to have read Matthew Arnold. To what purpose were the Essays in Criticism written when this sort of thing can appear in a respectable — or, at any rate, a respected — English journal today? (C73-4)

Again, Arnold is invoked when Muir quotes a report of Anglican plans to support the Scottish religious revival in 1922:

Still — 'with such a committee strategic centres might be available without an undue amount of organisation and sensational advertising.' Shades of Matthew Arnold! — to name no greater Name. 'Without an undue amount of... sensational advertising'! But these serious gentlemen already speak to the Press only, and in the very voice of the Press, for it is to be hoped that proposals and language of this kind take a long time in reaching the ears of God. (C73-63)

But even when he is not actually named, the battle is waged in Arnoldian terms:

4. It also provided a support of the Fabian Movement which had sponsored Orage and Holbrook Jackson when they took over The New Age in 1907: see David S. Thatcher, Nietzsche in England 1890-1914 (Toronto, 1970), p.228.

The difference between Lord Burnham and ourselves is now clear. He is responsible for the maintenance of superstition, and we, for the diffusion of light. That light may be dangerous, and dangerous especially to those who love darkness, may be true; but, in the name of the two persons in the trinity of duty, and in that of something else which it is difficult to name, we are bound — freely — to pursue it. (C73-70)

Although Eliot had a quite different intellectual training, he publicises a new edition of Arnold's notes in a 'Commentary' article (III, 10 January 1925, p.162) and makes a slight but significant obeisance similar to Muir's when he questions the role and attitude of newspapers in the controversy over Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness:

What is disquieting about the affair is the solemn hysteria on both sides, a solemn hysteria which, as Mr Clive Bell would say, is uncivilised. But whereas Miss Hall's hysteria is an aberration from civilization, that of the Sunday Express is a degradation of civilization, and is much the more alarming of the two. It is indeed distressing to find that The Morning Post, The Times, The Daily Herald and other reputable papers are negligent shepherds of public morals, and that our security against vice and perversion depends upon the Sunday Express. There, as Matthew Arnold would say, is sweetness for you! there is light! (VIII 30 September 1928, p.3)⁵

Eliot's more general attitude to the press runs closely parallel to Muir's. For example, he observes that

the language is probably in a healthier condition among the lower classes of society — who do not really read newspapers at all — than it is among the middle and upper classes.

(VI vi, December 1927, p.481)

5. Again, further references to Arnold are scattered throughout the series: for example in V3, June 1927, p.286 and VII 1, January 1928, p.3.

The echoes of the opening 'Our Generation' article, with the comment that 'already unquestioning magnanimity is most easily found among those who are called illiterate — among those who do not read the newspapers' (C73-1), are particularly strong here.

Similarly, the feeling that the other institutions of English society are also failing is common to both series. For instance, Muir attacks the Church for not taking account of new developments in modern thought:

Part of all blind opposition to ideas is caused by the inertia of men who do not want to see the light, and part, as every propagandist of ideas knows, by some concealed interest. The character of great interests, however, is that without reflection they speak for one another. If one interest is threatened, all interests defend it. The Pall Mall Gazette, except in so far as it is obscurantist, is not directly threatened by psychoanalysis, but the sway of the Roman Catholic Church and of the medical profession is. For the Church was the spiritual healer of men, the medical profession their earthly healer; and to both, therefore, it appears, falsely, to be advantageous to discourage a new competitor. As for the Pall Mall Gazette, it is an interest; so is the Church; so is medicine. Voila tout.

(C73-11)

However, he makes it clear that the ideal would be for the Churches to stop evading such issues and to become a leading force in society:

The Church has a complex about the flesh, because it has never dared to incarnate the spirit in flesh. The spirit also has therefore died; and the Church is now equally incompetent to judge of spiritual or sensual matters, which means of everything, for in man every action is partly spiritual, partly material... 'Become what thou art!' said Nietzsche — that is, what you know yourself to be: but we all prefer to remain what we believe ourselves to be. The Church is in the same closed circle as all

of us; or, rather, all of us are in the same closed circle as the Church. (C73-18)

Eliot's attack on the revised Prayer Book is similarly an appeal to the Church to become strong in defence of its own values:

The Preface reads like a rather embarrassed apology for change: everything is changing, so the Prayer Book must change. 'Far and wide the country has yielded place to the town, and the growth of knowledge has given to millions instead of thousands new means of earning their daily bread'. That may be so; but what connexion have these economic phenomena with the revision of a Prayer Book; and if they are connected, are they connected rationally?... The editors continue: 'in religion as in all else truth is not prized less highly because it is no longer fenced on any side'. But when fences are down the cattle will roam, including two vagrant beasts named infinite and eternal, words which will wander so far, the fence of meaning being down, that they will cease to belong anywhere. (V 2ii, May 1927, p.190)

Moreover, Eliot follows Muir's practice of focussing his general dissatisfaction with the Church on the figure of Dean Inge, taking particular issue with his attempts to popularise religion through the Press. For example, Muir's first attack is on the grounds that 'he says and does things without giving the reasons for them'; that being 'without a *raison d'etre* of his own he is obliged to borrow and express the theories which he finds around him'; and that consequently 'in him one does not know whether journalism is becoming the Church or the Church is becoming journalism' (C73-7). Correspondingly, Eliot writes:

Dean Inge attacks culture from within; by violent and unmeasured statements on literary matters in his occasional essays in an evening newspaper. It is possible that Dean Inge feels it necessary to write down to the level of newspaper readers:

if so he is wholly mistaken; for nothing is ever gained by writing down to any level. (II 7, April 1924, p.233)

Inge is regarded by both as representing the Church's lack of conviction about its role, and this inner vacuity is defined for them and by them in his 'journalistic' use of language, although neither feels it necessary to give examples of his style: it is assumed that their readers will share their own sophistication of approach to his writing.

There are, furthermore, several general themes which the two series of articles share. For instance, Muir was writing drama criticism for The Scotsman, and he occasionally comments on plays he has seen or theatrical matters (for example, C73-15/26/32/5), while Eliot frequently recommends the productions of the Phoenix Society (for instance, II 7, April 1924, p.234-5; II 8, July 1924, p.374-5; IV iii, June 1926, p.413-9). Both feel impelled to comment when institutional powers seem to fail in their duty: Muir's attack on fox-hunting (C73-32) may be compared with Eliot's pleas for the preservation of London's churches, for instance (IV 4, October 1926, p.628 and VI 1, January 1928, p.1-4).

Interestingly, they also share the same blind spot in regarding cinema as exclusively harnessed to the values of the popular mass media: Muir notes as an example of bad taste the comment that 'if England lost her lead in this industry... there would be an immediate and general decline in her intellectual life' (C73-71), and returns to the subject in an attack on the aesthetics of the Manchester Guardian:

We can only ask... whether (a man) could not be regenerated as easily by a real work of art as by a farrago of sordid and sentimental nonsense more silly even than Dean Inge's sermons. If a man is to be 'saved', is there any reason why he should

not be saved with good taste?... The Manchester Guardian, of course, misses entirely the real danger of the cinema: its persistent encouragement of ugliness, and its insidious destruction of any popular conception of beauty. (C73-77)

Eliot's belief that 'the cinema, because it is without words, is a potent agent against the intellect' (IV 3, June 1926, p.419) is also accompanied by a concern for the debased taste of film makers:

It is a question of what happens to the minds of people who feast their eyes every night, when in a peculiarly passive state under the hypnotic influence of continuous music, upon films the great majority of which have been concocted in studios of the Hollywood type. On the other hand, they might not gain much by changing to Hollywood films made in Britain. (VI 4, October 1927, p.290)

However, there is no underestimation of the power of the popular philistinism. Both Muir and Eliot feel it necessary to defend the Russian Ballet when the Company visits London:

A little over a hundred years ago, Nelson set the fashion of looking at the signs of the times with one's blind eye. The fashion has lasted ever since, and by this time it has become a habit. This remark is apropos the incredible stupidity of reviews which have greeted 'Chout', the new ballet with music by Prokofieff, which was recently produced by the Russian dancers. If the notices prove anything it is that our critics are not able to see a broad joke, and a delicious one, when they see it. Or, perhaps, that their conception of art demands something pretty, a little sickly, sensuous but not too sensuous; lingerie seen by moonlight. Yet it is baffling when something clearly and naively healthy like 'Chout' is regarded as perverse and diseased. (C73-33)

From November 27 the London public is to have the inestimable privilege of a season of the Diaghilev Ballet, and will be able to see again Leonid Massine and Lydia Lopokova, as well as several

new acquisitions of the finest ballet in Europe. Let us hope that Sir Oswald Stoll will be able to provide, at the Coliseum, other turns of sufficient liveliness to induce our London audiences to sit through the performance of the greatest mimetic dancer in the world — Massine — to the music of one of the greatest musicians — Stravinski. The writer of these lines recalls his efforts, several years ago, to restrain (with the point of an umbrella) the mirth of his neighbours in a 'family house' which seemed united to deride Sokalova at her best in the Sacre du Printemps. May we at least tolerate a part of what Paris has appreciated! (III 9, October 1924, p.5)

Their shared attitude to this issue is typical of the underlying purpose of the articles in facilitating the revaluation (albeit in different directions) of accepted traditions and habits of thought. But this example also highlights an occasional closeness in the strategy of the columns. Neither attempts any detailed discussion of the merits of the Ballet: 'Chout' is described as 'a broad joke', 'something clearly and naively healthy'; Massine is simply 'the greatest mimetic dancer in the world', Stravinski 'one of the greatest musicians'; but no reasons are given for these rather impressionistic verdicts. It is assumed that the reader will be aware of the merits of the Company. The approach is oblique in both cases: the brevity of the pieces, and their coming at the foot of the columns, suggest a shared assumption that the ready sympathy of the reader prevents the need for prolonged argument. Both emphasise England's failure to keep up with European developments; and both refer to the debased taste of popular entertainments (Muir's 'lingerie by moonlight', Eliot's hope that other 'turns' will induce the audience to 'sit through' the ballet). And like Muir's attitude of naive bafflement, and Eliot's mock plea for the minimum amount of

tolerance, these factors imply that the reader and the writer are united against popular philistinism.

Furthermore, Eliot seems to be approaching here the ironic, slightly cynical tone that became increasingly apparent in the 'Our Generation' articles. The note is sounded only occasionally in the 'Commentaries': for example, in discussing the state of the London churches, he declares:

We renounce any attempt to appeal to our Shepherds on the argument for Art, or the beauty of London. We would remind them rather — meeting them on what should be their own ground — that if the church invisible is in decay, it is hardly likely, in the long run, to be restored by the destruction of visible churches. (IV IV,

October 1926, p.629)

To introduce the idea that there is no point in appealing to those in charge on the grounds of art or beauty immediately suggests that they are rather narrow-minded and unsuited to the kind of responsibility they carry; but to go on to refer to the state of the church as 'what should be their own ground', as if there were some doubt about their commitment to religion, implies a much graver concern than the topic would immediately appear to suggest. The painstaking tone of 'it is hardly likely... to be restored by the destruction of visible churches', which sounds as if Eliot sees himself as wearily pointing out obvious truths to rather recalcitrant children, makes it clear that the appeal is primarily to the reader of the column: it is not a simple memorandum to the prelates. Like Muir, he is trying to motivate his audience to take a more active interest in such matters — and to see them from his point of view; and like 'Moore', he can seem to despair of the success of the enterprise.

A similar attitude is taken to the holding of a general election:

All that can be predicted this year is the usual waste of time, money and energy, a very small vote in consequence of the increased number of voters, and the return, known to Dryden, of 'old consciences with new faces'. (VIII XXXII, April 1929, p.377)

Yet Eliot's cynicism never becomes as pervasive as 'Moore's', and Eliot's column goes on undaunted. This is partly because he is not seeking the kind of immediate and obvious political change that a switch to Social Credit demanded: and perhaps it's also, to some extent, because Eliot was only writing these articles quarterly or monthly, so avoiding the strain of tackling such problems unsuccessfully to a weekly schedule.

But Eliot's constancy is also attributable, at a deeper level, to his not having had to make so many compromises as Muir with the society he wanted to influence. Both came from outwith the London literary world, and their experience of the cultural situations in their own countries had made them seek the kind of central authority it seemed to them to represent. Being outsiders, they assume the freedom to criticise the centre in their writings when it seems to be failing in the role they attribute to it. But whereas Eliot came from an upper class family and had studied at several universities in America and Europe, Muir came from a working class background and had no academic qualifications at all. And while America, an independent country, was coming to material dominance over the rest of the world, Scotland, reduced to the status of a mere province, was sinking deeper into industrial decline. Each of these factors improved Eliot's acceptability to the centre and increased his self-confidence as it made it harder for

Muir to find an audience and diminished the value he attributed to the national and class elements of his identity; and the influence of these larger aspects of the wider context in which they wrote on the contrasting degrees of their success cannot be overlooked without the adoption of a narrow definition of 'literature' which would run quite counter to their own social and political concerns.

Bibliographical Appendices

Appendix 2 (a): 'Our Generation'

'Our Generation'

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'Causerie de Jeudi'

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Appendix 2 (c): Periodical publications on Scottish matters

Periodical publications on Scottish matters

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		'Why Scots Writers Emigrate'	E
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1932	C403	Chapter 22, <u>Poor Tom</u>	E
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	C406	'A New Scottish Novelist' (Fionn MacColla)	R
	C408	'Scott and Tradition'	E
	C409	'Best Sellers of Yesterday: VI. William Black'	E
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	C469	'Prosperous Orkneys'	E
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	C473	'Bolshevism and Calvinism'	E
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1935	C519	'Lewis Grassie Gibbon: An Appreciation'	E
	C526	'Pages from a Scottish Journey'	E
	C532	'Literature from 1910 to 1935'	E
	C538	'Fletcher of Saltoun'	R
	C571	'A Romantic Poet' (Byron)	R
	C573	'Glasgow Slums' (<u>No Mean City</u>)	R
1936	C581	'Scotland: That Distressed Area'	R
	C586a	'Social Credit and the Labour Party'	E
	C613	'Literature Without a Language'	E
	C639	'Burns and Holy Willie'	E
	C651	'Scott's Critics'	R
1937	C683	'The Late Sir James Barrie'	E
	C695a	'Notes on the Way'	E
	C709	'Knox in Scottish History'	R
	C714	'Scottish Literature'	R
1938	C744	'The Scottish Character'	E
1940	C837a	'Yesterday's Mirror: Afterthoughts to an Autobiography'	E
1941	C878a	'Literature and the Arts in Scotland'	E
1942	C904	'The Admirable Crichton'	E
1943	C925a	'A Mature Book: the Quality of <u>The Serpent</u> '	R
1946	C970	'Walter Scott'	E
1949	C1009	'Robert Burns'	R
1950	C1046a	'Stevenson and Storyman'	E
1951	C1047a	'Scottish Culture and Adult Education'	E
1952	C1104	'The Real Robert Louis Stevenson'	R
1954	C1163	'The Scorpion'	R
1957	C1226	'Ballads'	R
1958	C1257	'Nooks of Scotland'	E
	C1271	'Facts and Flytings'	R
1959		'Robert Burns, Master of Scottish Poetry'	
		<u>Glasgow Herald</u> , 24.1.59, p.6	E

1. E: Essay
R: Review

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